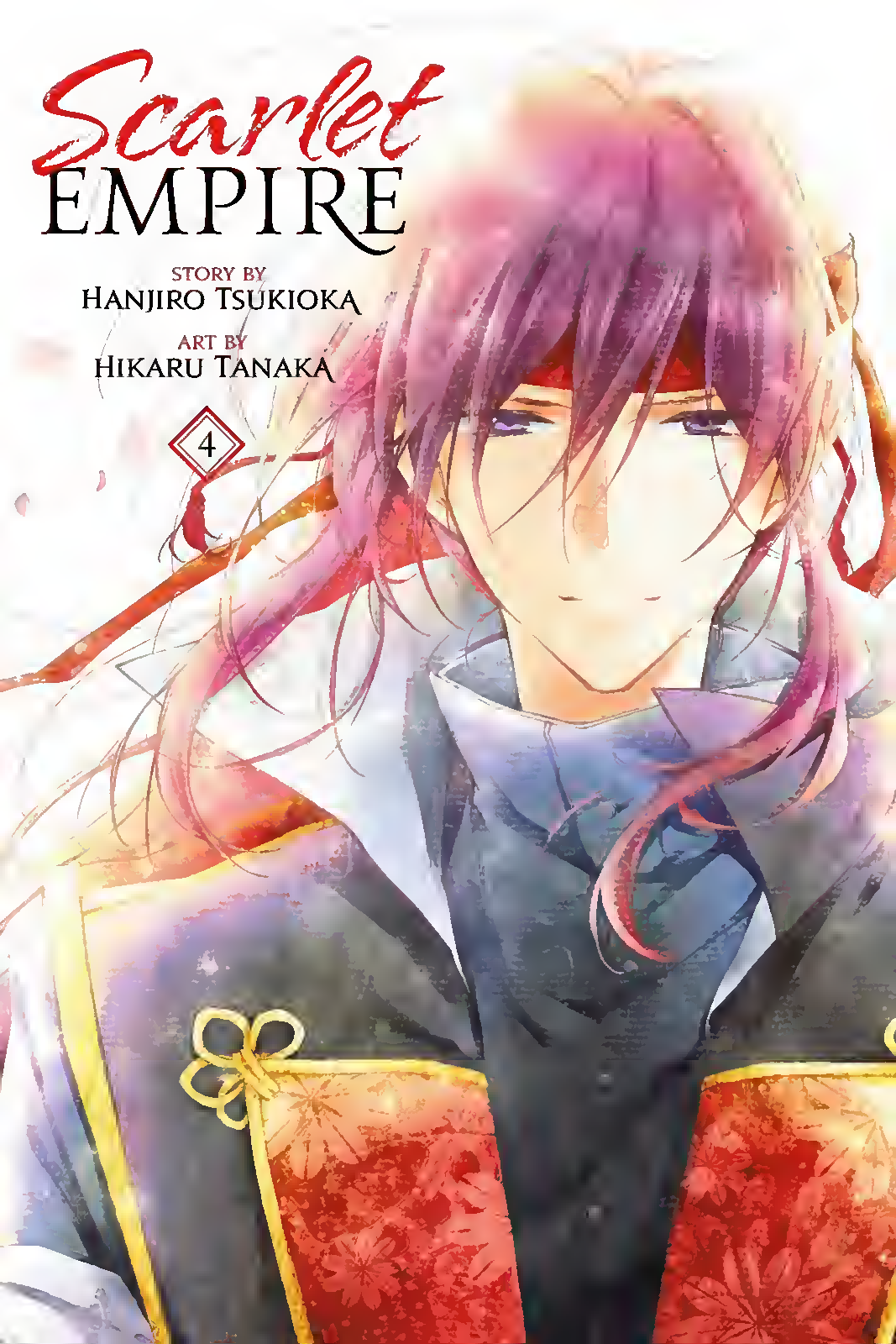
4
FINAL
STORY BY
HANJIRO
TSUKIOKA
ART BY
HIKARU
TANAKA
Scarlet
EMPIRE

Scarlet EMPIRE

STORY BY
HANJIRO TSUKIOKA

ART BY
HIKARU TANAKA

4



CONTENTS

CHAPTER 18 ◇ A PLEDGE BY FIREFLY LIGHTS — 003

CHAPTER 19 ◇ THE CHANGING WINDS OF FATE — 031

CHAPTER 20 ◇ A CYCLE OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS — 061

CHAPTER 21 ◇ FEELINGS TEETERING ON THE BRINK — 101

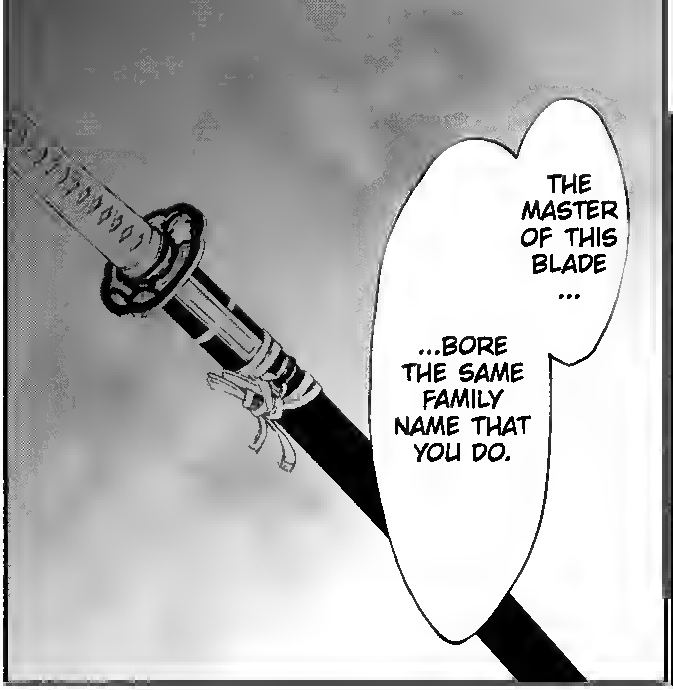
CHAPTER 22 ◇ HARBINGERS OF AN ERA — 157

CHAPTER 23 ◇ A MIRACULOUS ENCOUNTER — 195

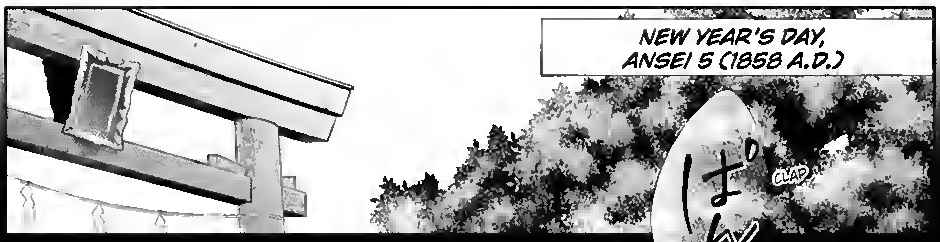
CHAPTER 24 ◇ FARAWAY FUTURES AND WILLFUL WAYS — 229

FINAL CHAPTER ◇ THE PROMISED TIME — 271

THE SWORDS I ENTRUSTED TO YOU...
...WERE INHERITED FROM A LONGTIME COMRADE-IN-ARMS OF MINE.
HIS NAME WAS...
...
SEITAROU MIYASAKA
...



Chapter 18: A Pledge by Firefly Lights



STOP, THIEF!
PLEASE... SOMEONE CATCH HIM!
!!!
SKSH
SWHHP
TCH ...
KCHAK
THUD

...!
CLANG
OUTTA MY WAAAY!!
WE'RE TOO UNEVENLY MATCHED...!
KA-CLANG
WHOA...
DASH
GOTCHA—
WHOA, WHOA!

ALL RIGHT, THAT'S ENOUGH!!
!!?
SLASH
SORRY !!
KCHAK

WOW... THAT WAS CLOSE, HUH?
CLANK
THUD
...!!
SNFF
HERE.
Y-YES. I AM IN YOUR DEBT...
CLASP
YOU ALL RIGHT?
AT LEAST HE SPARED THAT FACE!
GRIN
WHAAAT? DON'T WORRY AB—
YANK
BUH?
SLIP

SPLASH
WHA...!
...!
.....
.....
.....
NOT AT ALL...
UH.....
SORRY.
HAHH...
SPLOSH
WAAH! COLD!
AAAUGH!!
THIS POND IS FREEZING!!!

SIGN: MIYASAKA DOJO

I AM SHIROU ZAEMON MASAMITSU KOJIMA.
I RUN A PRIVATE ACADEMY IN AKASAKA, EDO, WHERE I LECTURE ON LITERATURE AND MILITARY STRATEGY.

LOOK, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SO FORMAL.
I'M THE ONE WHO OUGHTA BE THANKING YOU!
THAT THIEF'S BEEN GIVING ALL THE VILLAGERS AROUND HERE A LOT OF TROUBLE LATELY.
HE'S BAGGED AT LAST, THANKS TO YOU!
BUT...I DIDN'T...
GRAB
HEY, DON'T SWEAT THE DETAILS!
LIGHTEN UP A LITTLE!
ALL RIGHT?
I'M SEITAROU MIYASAKA.
THE HEIR TO THIS KENDO DOJO!
SHIROU-SAN!
DO YOU COME TO THAT SHRINE A LOT?
YES... AT THE NEW YEAR AND OTHER OCCASIONS NOW AND THEN ...
NO KIDDING? THE GOD OF HIKAWA'S BEEN LOOKING AFTER US FOR GENERATIONS TOO!
OH, HEY, NEVER MIND THAT!
DO YOU REALLY RUN AN ACADEMY!?
ER...
YES...
STARE
STARE
WELL, SEE, I'VE GOT AN OLD PAL WHOSE FAMILY RUNS AN ACADEMY TOO! I TOLD HIM TO LET ME IN, BUT HE SAID, "YOU'RE HOPELESS," AND FLAT-OUT REFUSED! ISN'T THAT ROTTEN!?
HE'S A REAL SNEAKY KINDA GUY, YOU KNOW! OH...MY OLD PAL, I MEAN!
WHAT DO YOU WANNA BET HE JUST DIDN'T WANT ME TO GET SMARTER THAN HIM!?
MAN, SERIOUSLY, HE'S ALWAYS BEEN...
LIKE THIS AND THAT AND...
HE TALKS A LOT...
BLAH
BLAH
BLAH
BLAH

THAT'S WHY, I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO TRY STUDYING, JUST ONCE!
PLEASE, LET ME INTO YOUR ACADEMY!
I THINK THIS IS FATE OR SOME-THING... I'M BEGGING YOU!
YOU'RE ALWAYS WELCOME, BUT...
YOU MEAN IT!?
ALL RIGHT!! I PROMISE ME, YEAH?
SHAKE
SHAKE
RIGHT, THEN!
IF WE'RE DOING THIS, I'LL HAVE TO CONVINCE MY OLD MAN FIRST!
AND THEN I'LL TALK TO THE PUPILS ...
AND THEN, AND THEN ...
HE WAS SUCH A SUNNY PERSON AND SO TRUE TO HIM-SELF.
I STILL REMEM-BER THINK-ING SO EVEN NOW.
OCTOBER, THAT SAME YEAR

BAM
BAM
BAM
BAM
HEYYY!
LEEET MEEE IIIN!
CREAK
WOOOW!
I ALMOST DIDN'T BELIEVE IT, BUT... YOU REALLY DO LIVE IN THIS FANCY MANSION!
DON'T TELL ME...
YOU CAME AFTER ALL!
SEI-TAROU ...!
...YOU THOUGHT I'D FORGET MY PROMISE?

SHI-ROU. YOU KNOW ABOUT IT TOO, DON'T YOU?
THE SHO-GUNATE'S RECENT CRACKDOWN ON IMPERIAL LOYALISTS...
WOW, THOUGH I'M GLAD...
...THE ACADEMY HERE IS SAFE...
YES...
THE ANSEI PURGE...
PEOPLE FROM MY VILLAGE HAVE PAID THE PRICE TOO.
YOU REMEMBER THAT OLD PAL OF MINE I WAS TALKING ABOUT? THE ONE WITH THE ACADEMY ...?
HIS FAMILY WAS SLAUGH-TERED
...!!

I... I WANT TO PROTECT HIM...!
NOBODY KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED TO MY PAL...HE MIGHT BE ON THE RUN WITH HIS OLD MAN.
THEY HUNG THEM UP AND LEFT THEM TO DIE AS PUBLIC EXAMPLES...
HIS MOTHER AND SISTER WERE USED AS THEIR PLAYTHINGS AND BEATEN HORRIBLY.
THEY SET HIS FATHER'S ACADEMY ON FIRE JUST BECAUSE HE WAS A LOYALIST.
CALM DOWN, SEITAROU...!
I'D DO ANYTHING, EVEN IF IT MEANS REBELLION!!!
I'M NOT GONNA LEAVE MY COUNTRYMEN IN THE HANDS OF THAT BASTARD II AND THE CURRENT SHOGUNATE ...!
SLAM
...THE MASTERMIND BEHIND THIS CRACKDOWN! NAOSUKE II!
THAT'S WHY I WANT TO DESTROY ...
...!
THAT'S EASY FOR YOU TO SAY...!
TO DESTROY THE SHOGUNATE, YOU MUST FIRST PREPARE YOURSELF—
IF YOU FLING YOURSELF BLINDLY INTO THIS, YOU'LL ONLY FALL VICTIM TO ANOTHER CRACKDOWN.

SEITAROU, LISTEN TO ME.
I OPENED THIS ACADEMY IN HOPES OF BRINGING DOWN THE SHOGUNATE SOMEDAY.
TO RECRUIT LIKE-MINDED MEN, AND TRAIN THEM INTO A FIGHTING FORCE...
...AS WE AWAIT THE MOMENT FOR REVOLT.
.....!!
SEITA-ROU. YOU HAVE GREAT SKILL WITH THE SWORD.
BUT WITHOUT WISDOM, YOU WILL BE UNABLE TO TRULY PUT THAT STRENGTH TO USE.
STARTING TODAY, I WILL ENTRUST ALL THE KNOWLEDGE I POSSESS TO YOU.
WILL YOU FOLLOW ME?

THAT'S ALL I EVER WANTED!
AND SO, SEITAROU BECAME A PUPIL AT MY ACADEMY AND STROVE FIERCELY AT HIS STUDIES.
HE STUDIED WITH MORE PASSION THAN ANY OF MY OTHER PUPILS.
I MYSELF LEARNED FROM HIS FERVOR, AND WE WORKED WELL TOGETHER AS MASTER AND APPRENTICE.
.....
"AND THUSLY ARE THE TACTICS OF THE YAMAGA SCHOOL PERFORMED."
WHICH MEANS ...
UGHHH ...
I'M SORRY, I JUST DON'T GET IT.
READ IT OVER OFTEN, AND YOU WILL.
SORRY... AND AFTER YOU GAVE ME REMEDIAL LESSONS TOO...
I DON'T MIND.
BUT THERE ARE POINTS TO THIS STRATEGY EVEN I CAN'T PUZZLE OUT.
LET'S SEE...
AH, YES, THIS PART!
STARE
IT WOULD BE MORE EFFECTIVE IF IT WERE COMBINED WITH THE IDEAS OF THE KOSHU SCHOOL...
MUTTER
BUT ON THE OTHER HAND...
MUTTER
WOW...
SHIROU ...
YOU REALLY ARE AMAZING.
HM?
I MEAN, YOU'RE SO FULL OF HUNGER FOR KNOWLEDGE...
YOU KNOW SO MUCH ALREADY, BUT YOU JUST KEEP AIMING HIGHER.
YOU ALWAYS SAY...
..."MOST LIKELY PEOPLE FLOCK TO MY ACADEMY BECAUSE OF MY WEALTH." BUT...

...I DON'T THINK THAT'S IT.
YOU'RE NOT PROUD OF YOUR POWER; YOU DON'T FLAUNT WHAT YOU HAVE.
THAT'S THE KIND OF MAN YOU ARE, AND I THINK THAT'S WHY WE ALL FOLLOW YOU.
.....
OHO! ARE YOU BLUSHING!?
YOU'RE BLUSHING, AREN'T YOU!?
THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TODAY.
I'D LIKE YOU TO READ ALL OF THESE AGAIN TOMORROW.
GAH!
THUMP
HOLD ON, SHIROU!
I'M SORRY FOR TEASING YOU!
OH, AND I HAVEN'T ANY PUPILS COMING TOMORROW, SO...
...IF YOU FINISH READING THOSE ...
SFX: STAMP STAMP STAMP
...COULD YOU OVERSEE MY TRAINING?
JUST LEAVE IT TO ME!

YOU COULD SAY...
...HE BECAME MY DEAREST FRIEND.
MARCH, MAN'EN 1 (1860 A.D.)
CLATTER
SHI-ROU!
CLATTER
CLATTER
SHIROU ...!!
NAO-SUKE II!
HE WAS ASSAS-SINATED OUTSIDE THE SAKURADA GATE!
SLAM
THEY DID IT! THE GODS ARE ON OUR SIDE!
THAT BAS-TARD ...
WHAT ...? CHIEF MINIS-TER II IS...!?
THE MITO ROSHI DID IT!
ROSHI KILLING A CHIEF MINISTER... WHAT AN UNBELIEV-ABLE TURNING POINT!
THIS HAS TO BE THE MOMENT FOR REVOLT, SHIROU!
A NEW AGE IS COMING ...!
...AGE...
...NEW...

THE WORLD IS CHANGING. THE TIME HAS COME.
FROM NOW ON, I WANT TO TRAVEL THE COUNTRY, RALLYING KINDRED SPIRITS.
I THINK I SHALL TRAVEL TO AKITA FIRST.
MAY, BUNKYUU 1 (1861 A.D.)
SEI-TAROU ...
I'M CLOSING THE ACADEMY.
COME WITH ME, WON'T YOU?
NOT AS MY PUPIL, BUT AS MY COMRADE.
I WANT YOUR SUPPORT BY MY SIDE.
SHI-ROU...
THANK YOU.
BUT... I'M SORRY.
I WON'T GO WITH YOU.

WHEN THE SAKURA-DAMON INCIDENT HAPPENED A YEAR AGO...I DID A LOT OF THINKING.
YOU KNOW, ABOUT WHAT I COULD DO FROM NOW ON.
BUT ALL THAT I COULD PICTURE WERE THE FACES OF MY FAMILY AND MY FRIENDS.
I GUESS DOING GREAT THINGS... CHANGING COUNTRIES AND REWRITING THE FUTURE LIKE YOU...ISN'T WHAT I'M CUT OUT FOR AFTER ALL.
AND, YOU KNOW, I'M NOT LIKE YOU.
I WANT TO USE MY STRENGTH IN REAL BATTLE, NOT JUST AS A DETERRENT.
THE ANSEI PURGE ...
I SAW THAT TRAGEDY WITH MY OWN EYES, SO...
...I NEVER WANT TO LET ANYONE DEAR TO ME...
...SUFFER LIKE THAT EVER AGAIN.
IF YOU'RE LEAVING THE CITY, I'M GOING TO TRY GOING HOME.
I THINK I NEED TO PROTECT OUR DOJO AND THE GOD OF HIKAWA.
BUT BEFORE I DO...I WANT TO SEARCH FOR HIM...
MY MISSING PAL...
SHIKYOU.

SHIKYOU ...
YEAH. SHIKYOU KAWASE.
HEY, SINCE YOU'LL BE TRAVELING ALL OVER, LET ME KNOW IF YOU HEAR HIS NAME!
I DUNNO WHY, BUT... EVEN THOUGH ALL WE EVER DID WAS FIGHT... I CAN'T JUST ABANDON HIM...
.....
ANYWAY, I KNOW I SAID A LOT, BUT—!
THAT DOESN'T MEAN I'VE REJECTED YOUR STANCE, OKAY!?
SNAP
YOU'VE GOT THE RIGHT KNACK FOR GUIDING OUR COUNTRY-MEN!
YOU HAVE TO USE THAT POWER FOR OUR COUNTRY'S SAKE!
YOU DO WHAT YOU DO BEST...
...AND I'LL WORK BY DOING WHAT I DO BEST TOO.
OH, RIGHT! HERE!
SHOVE
TAKE THESE IN MY PLACE!

I'M PROUD TO CALL YOU MY TEACHER AND MY COMRADE!
IT'S ALL RIGHT!
MY THOUGHTS WILL ALWAYS GO WITH YOU, SHIROU!
SO SAYING, SEITA-ROU EN-TRUSTED HIS SWORDS TO ME...
...AND WE PARTED TO WALK DIFFER-ENT ROADS...

IN THE TIME SINCE, I HEARD RUMORS OF SEITAROU AS I ROVED ABOUT, BUT...
...EVEN THOSE HAVE CEASED IN RECENT TIMES.
I HAD MY CONCERNS, BUT I MADE NO INQUIRIES.
AFTER ALL, I KNEW HE WAS A MAN WHO COULD TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF.
BUT NOW ...
...SHIKYOU KAWASE HAS APPEARED BEFORE ME AT LAST.
THE OLD FRIEND FOR WHOM SEITAROU WAS SEARCHING IS ALIVE.
IT OUGHT TO BE A CAUSE FOR REJOICING.
BUT...
...SHIKYOU SEEKS TO TAKE MY LIFE AND CURSES MY NAME.
AND ...
...THIS HAS RESULTED IN THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE ...
THE DAY OF THE ATTACK ON THIS MANSION WAS THE FIRST TIME I MET SHIKYOU KAWASE.
UNTIL THEN, THE ONLY POINT OF CONTACT BETWEEN US HAD BEEN OUR MUTUAL FRIEND, SEITAROU...

HAS SOMETHING HAPPENED TO SEITAROU ...?
WERE THE TWO OF THEM EMBROILED IN SOMETHING WHILE I PAID NO HEED...?
I WAS AFRAID ...
...TO KNOW THE TRUTH.
IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO APPROACH SHIKYOU LIGHTLY.
BUT I HAVE NO WISH TO DRAG THE ROSHI BAND AND MY LOVED ONES INTO THIS BY DELAYING FURTHER...
I...
...DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO...
.....
I GET IT, SAGARA.
IN THAT CASE...

LET'S GO TOGETHER ...
...TO SEE SEITAROU'S FAMILY!

I DUNNO IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO SEITAROU, BUT...
...I DO KNOW THAT WORRYING ABOUT IT ALONE ISN'T GONNA HELP, RIGHT?

N-NO...
I KNOW NOT WHERE HE MAY BE, SO...
RIGHT, YEAH!
THAT'S WHY WE SHOULD TRY CHECKING WITH HIS FAMILY! THEY MIGHT KNOW SOMETHING, RIGHT!?

I THINK I MIGHT LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT MYSELF IF I FOLLOW UP ON HIM.
ANYWAY, A GUY CALLED "SEITAROU MIYASAKA"?
I CAN'T THINK OF HIM AS A STRANGER.
I'VE ALWAYS FELT THAT IT WAS NO COINCIDENCE...
FOR YOU TO APPEAR BEFORE ME, BEARING MIYASAKA'S NAME AND THOSE SWORDS...
AH... I FEEL THE SAME IN THAT RESPECT...
AT LEAST PRETEND YOU'VE STILL GOT THAT GUNG-HO ATTITUDE OF YOURS!!
AM I JUST GOING NUTS, OR ARE YOU REALLY THAT KINDA GUY!?
ROAR
EEEK!
AWW, COME ON! WHAT THE HELL? THAT'S NOT LIKE YOU!!
BUT... THAT IS TO SAY...TO APPROACH HIS FAMILY...
SHOULD WE REALLY ...?
もじ？…
FIDGET
WE'LL DEAL WITH THIS TOGETHER, OKAY?
LET'S GO FACE SEITAROU.

IT'LL BE FINE AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER!!
RIGHT?
...YES.

LET'S GO.

Scarlet
EMPIRE

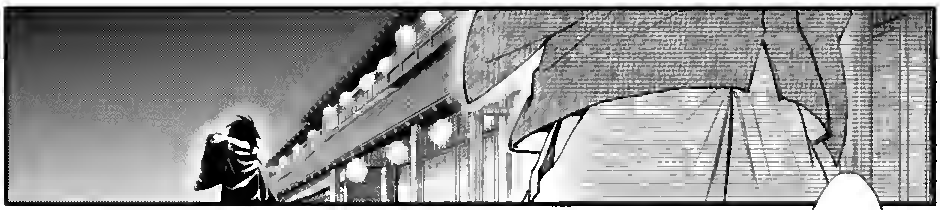
I SEE...
SO IT ALL CENTERS AROUND THIS FRIEND OF HIS, SEITAROU-SAN, AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH SHIKYOU KAWASE ...
...AND CAPTAIN SAGARA HAS BEEN FRETTING OVER IT ALONE WITHOUT VOICING THE ISSUE, EH?
YEAH ...
THAT'S WHY SAGARA AND I ARE GONNA TRY GOING TO SEE SEITAROU'S FAMILY TOMORROW.
MUNCH
はぐ
SAGARA WAS ACTING WAY MORE NERVOUS THAN USUAL...I DUNNO HOW IT'S GONNA TURN OUT, BUT...
...WE'VE DECIDED TO FACE THIS TOGETHER.
I WANNA HELP HIM OUT HOWEVER I CAN.
I WONDER, IS IT REALLY OKAY NOT TO TELL EVERYBODY...
...THAT THIS "SEITAROU" GUY'S LAST NAME IS "MIYASAKA," SAME AS MINE?
.....
THIS COULD GET COMPLICATED...
もぐもぐ...
YOU REALLY ARE STRONG...
...AREN'T YOU, KOTETSU-KUN?

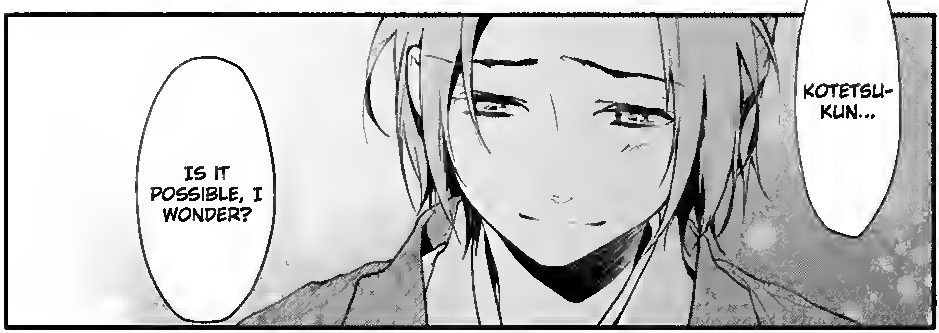
SFX: MUNCH MUNCH

HUH!?
BADUM
I WISH I COULD BE STRONG OF WILL AND BOLD OF ACTION... LIKE YOU.
ALL I CAN DO IS EXTEND A HELPING HAND TO THE WEAK, YOU SEE...
WHAT...? THAT'S A GOOD THING!
NOT REALLY ...
I'M A MERE COW-ARD.
SO MUCH TRAN-SPIRED WHEN WE WERE PROTECT-ING LORD SAKAMOTO IN THE CAPITAL...
I WAS QUITE AFRAID.
WHAT IF TO-MOR-ROW...
...I WERE TO DIE LIKE LORD SAKA-MOTO, LEAVING MY LOVED ONES BEHIND?
I TOO COULD DIE AT ANY TIME...
CLENCH
SHE IS... UN-ABLE TO HEAR.
YET EVEN SO, SHE PASSES EVERY DAY WITH A SMILE ON HER FACE, DESPITE HER HARSH WORK.
I WOULD LIKE TO RESCUE HER, BUT...
...I ALWAYS FALTER AT THE FIRST STEP, WONDER-ING IF A MAN LIKE ME COULD EVER MAKE HER HAPPY.
LIKE HIM, I HAVE ...
...SOME-ONE VERY DEAR TO ME.

I'VE BEEN FRETTING OVER IT MORE THAN MY OWN WORK...
RATHER A PATHETIC SHOWING, EH?
HA HA ...
...!
THAT'S NOT TRUE!
I THINK IT'S REALLY NICE OF YOU!
THERE'S NOTHING PATHETIC ABOUT IT!
PLUS ...
I'M ALWAYS BUTTING IN WITHOUT THINKING THINGS THROUGH AND HURTING PEOPLE, SO...
...I THINK TAKING A LITTLE WHILE TO FIGURE THINGS OUT...
...AND THINK OF THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU LIKE THAT IS AMAZING, NAITOU-SAN!
I RESPECT YOU FOR IT! SERIOUSLY!!

THANK YOU...
HEARING THAT FROM YOU GIVES ME COURAGE, SOMEHOW.
RIGHT ON! HAVE SOME CONFI-DENCE!!
I'M GONNA DO MY BEST TO GROW UP FAST! DO YOUR BEST FOR HER TOO, NAITOU-SAN!
I'M ROOTING FOR YOU!
BLUSH
WELL, I HAVE A FEW PLACES TO BE NOW, SO I'LL BE OFF...
SLIDE
CAN YOU FIND YOUR WAY BACK TO THE MAN-SION?
PERPLEXED
LOST.
Y-YEAH... MAYBE.
BE CAREFUL OUT THERE AT NIGHT, NAITOU-SAN!
THANK YOU, I WILL.
OH!
NAITOU-SAAAN!
THAT FOOD WAS GREAT!
LET'S DO THIS AGAIN SOMETIME!





Chapter 19: The Changing Winds of Fate

R-RIGHT ...
I GET IT, JUST PUT THE SWORD AWAY ...
...BUT IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO THE CAPTAIN, I WILL SLAY YOU WITHOUT MERCY. REMEMBER THAT.
I'M ONLY LEAVING THIS IN YOUR HANDS BECAUSE THE CAPTAIN ORDERED THAT YOU BE HIS SOLE GUARD...
LISTEN UP, YOU ...
SHING

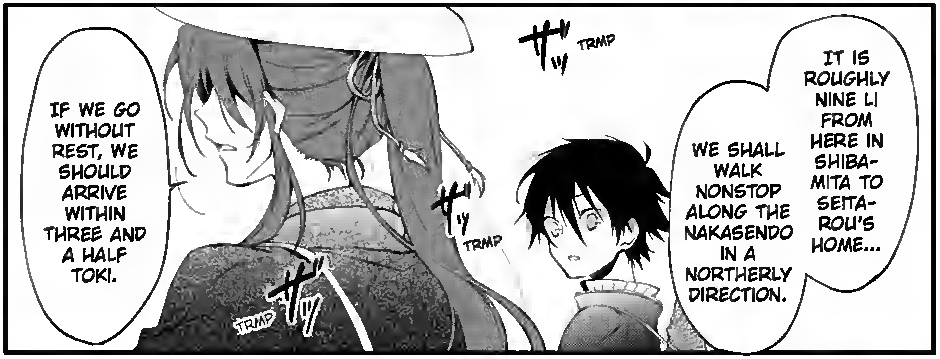
OKAY, MIZUHARA-SAN, OOKI, YOSHINO ...
WE'RE OFF!

AS YOU WISH ...
PLEASE TAKE CARE AS WELL, CAPTAIN.
UNTIL THEN, I LEAVE YOU IN COMMAND.
THERE MAY COME A TIME WHEN YOU MUST LEAVE THE MANSION... BUT WE WILL RETURN ON THE MORROW.

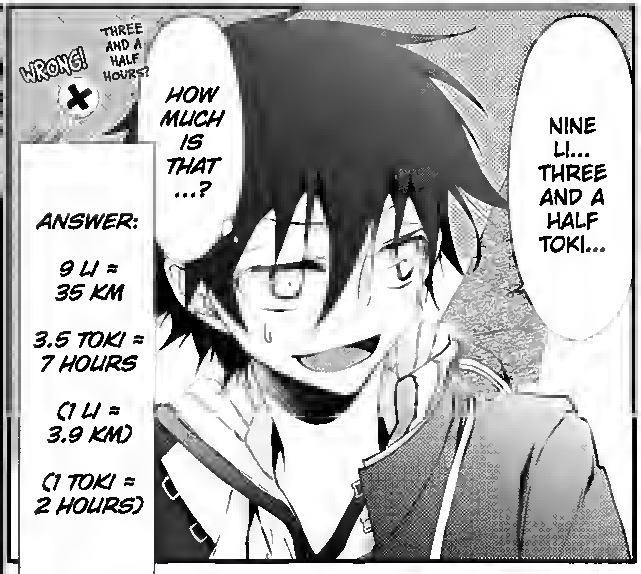
ONCE AGAIN, THE ROSHI BAND MUST STAND TOGETHER AND STRENGTHEN OUR GUARD WITHIN THE CITY...
...AND REMAIN WELL AWARE OF ANY MOVES BY LORD IMUTA OR LORD MASUMITSU.
MIZUHARA ...
FOR NOW, OUR BAND IS BOUND TO THE SATSUMA FACTION BY PERSONAL FAVOR... I KNOW NOT WHEN UNREST MAY BREAK OUT.

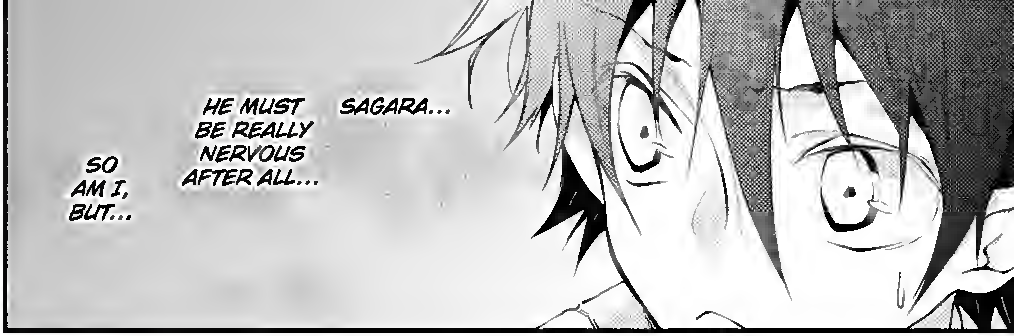
TRMP
TRMP

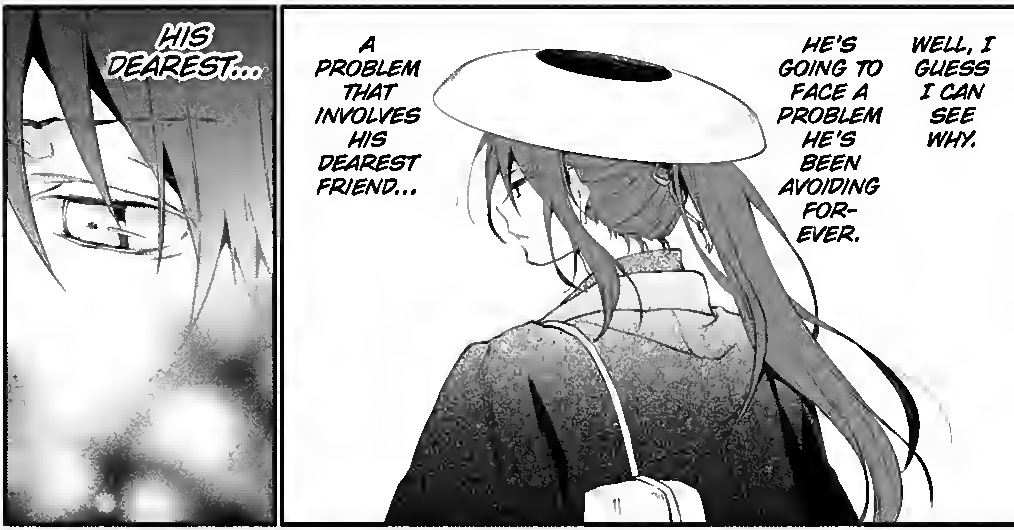
WHOOSH


IF WE GO WITHOUT REST, WE SHOULD ARRIVE WITHIN THREE AND A HALF TOKI.
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
WE SHALL WALK NONSTOP ALONG THE NAKASENDO IN A NORTHERLY DIRECTION.
IT IS ROUGHLY NINE LI FROM HERE IN SHIBA-MITA TO SEITA-ROU'S HOME...

TRMP
.....
TRMP
TRMP

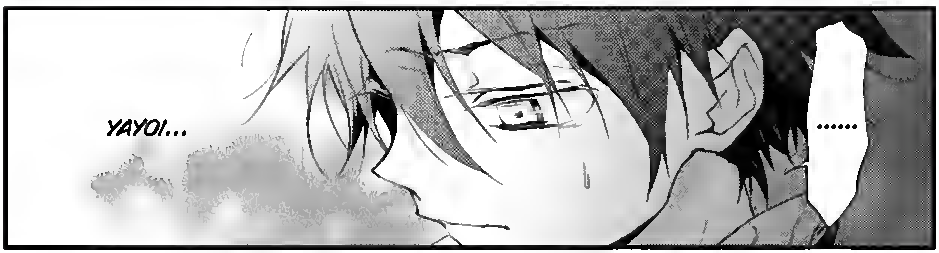

NINE LI... THREE AND A HALF TOKI...
HOW MUCH IS THAT ...?
WROOG!
THREE AND A HALF HOURS?
ANSWER:
9 LI = 35 KM
3.5 TOKI = 7 HOURS
(1 LI = 3.9 KM)
(1 TOKI = 2 HOURS)


SAGARA...
HE MUST BE REALLY NERVOUS AFTER ALL...
SO AM I, BUT...

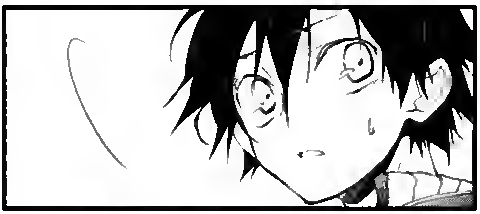

HIS DEAREST...
A PROBLEM THAT INVOLVES HIS DEAREST FRIEND...
HE'S GOING TO FACE A PROBLEM HE'S BEEN AVOIDING FOR-EVER.
WELL, I GUESS I CAN SEE WHY.

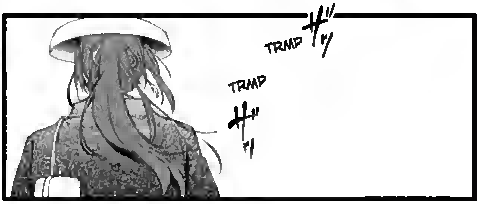
FLINCH
ビク!!
SLIDE
ガラ…

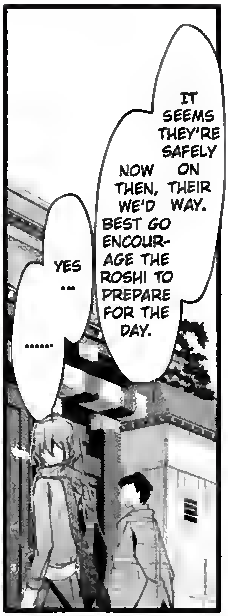
JUST DISAPPEAR.

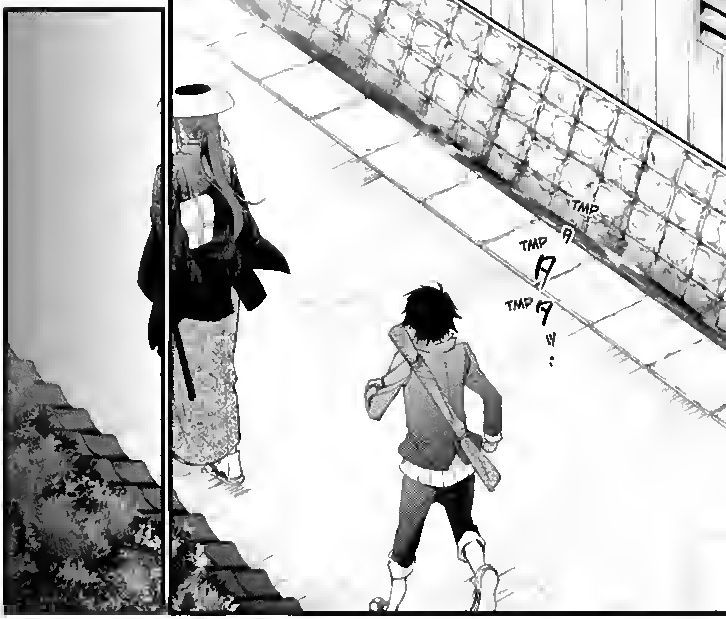

YAYOI...
.....

TRMP
TRMP
TRMP



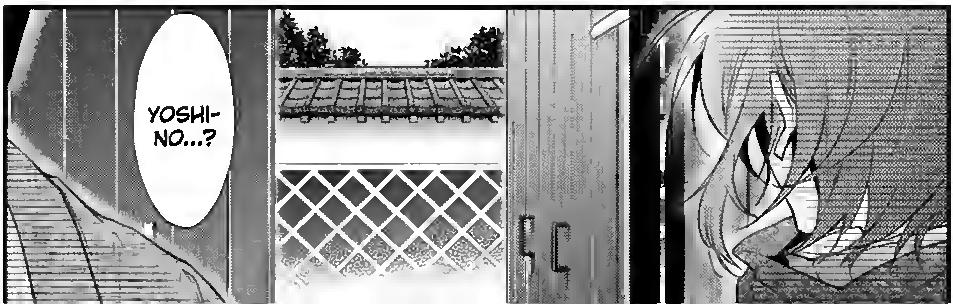

TRMP
TRMP

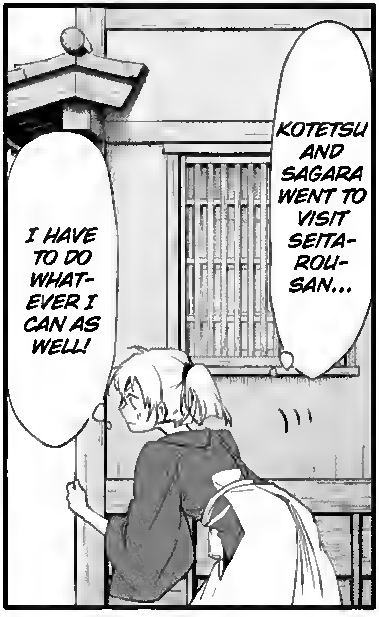

IT SEEMS THEY'RE SAFELY ON THEIR WAY.
NOW THEN, WE'D BEST GO ENCOURAGE THE ROSHI TO PREPARE FOR THE DAY.
YES...
.....


TMP
TMP
TMP

I'M SORRY FOR GETTING SO WORKED UP...
NOW THEN, YOSHINO.
YOU SHOULD HELP WITH THE MORNING PREPARATIONS AS W—

I KNOW, BUT MY BODY WON'T MOVE...
I KNOW, I KNOW...
OOKI. HOW MANY TIMES MUST I TELL YOU TO ACT, NOT MERELY ANSWER BACK?
STRAIN
TWITCH
TWITCH
TWITCH

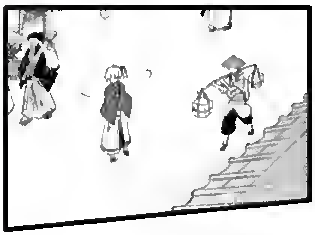

YOSHINO...?

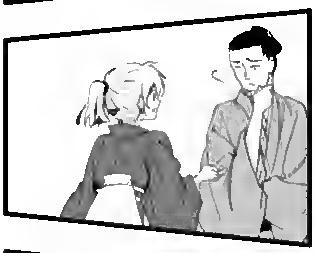


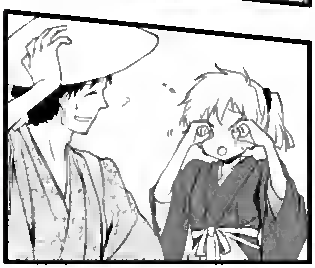
IF HE'S STILL HUNTING FOR SAGARA-HAN, IT STANDS TO REASON SHIKYOU WOULD COME TO EDO...

THE ROSHI ALL SEEM QUITE BUSY, WHICH LEAVES ME WITH THE MOST LIBERTY TO MOVE! I SIMPLY MUST FIND SHIKYOU!!

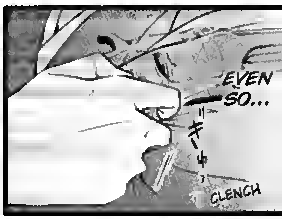
がらーーーん…。
CLATTER
ぽっん
PEEK
*ABOUT 6 A.M.
THAT SAID, I WON'T GET FAR WITH MY INQUIRIES NOW..IT'S ONLY THE SIXTH HOUR...







I WON'T GET ANYWHERE IF I DON'T START SOMEWHERE!
ダッ
DASH


EVEN SO...
キュッ
CLENCH

GRIT

I REFUSE TO GIVE UP!

NO, I MUSTN'T THINK LIKE THAT YET! I'VE ONLY BEEN SEARCHING FOR THREE TOKI!
SHAKE
SHAKE
ふるふる
SMACK
バチン

I SUPPOSE I WON'T FIND HIM THAT EASILY...

BOW
ペコッ

FWISH
THAT MAN...!!
BADUM
HUH!?
WHIP
SWIP
LUNGE
BUMP
OH!
I'M SO SORRY...
I'M FOLLOWING SOMEONE...!
BADUM
TRMP
TRMP
BADUM
TRMP
BADUM
TRMP

LOOK
LOOK
OH NO... I LOST HIM.
BUT I'M SURE HE CAME THIS WAY...
!?
HE'S GONE...
SILENCE
CLANK

THAT GATE...
AND THIS LANDSCAPE...
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP

!!!
THIS IS IT.
TRMP
IT CAN'T BE...
SAGA-RA...
BUT IT REALLY IS...
THIS ...
...IS MY HOUSE.

...
!!!
FWOO
AAAAH!
.....
YOU READY FOR THIS?
SAGA-RA?
.....
LET'S GO.
TRMP
IT'LL BE OKAY.
HEY, SAGA-RA...
I THINK ...
...YOUR FRIEND IS REALLY MY...
KNOCK
KNOCK
EXCUSE ME...!

COM-ING!
ONE MO-MENT ...!
SLIDE
ガラッ
ER...
WHO MIGHT YOU BE, MY LORDS?
ビク!
FLINCH
OH!
RIGHT, UH... I'M...
わた
FLUSTER
わた
FLUSTER
スッ
SHFF

I HAVE ...
...COME FROM AKASAKA IN EDO.
MY NAME IS SHIROU KOJIMA.
!!
.....
I SEE SO...
...YOU'RE THAT KOJI-MA-SAN.
CLATTER
FLINCH
PLEASE COME IN.

カチッ
CLINK
.....
スッ
SHFF
NOW, THEN.
WHY HAVE YOU COME HERE TODAY ...?
ゴクリ
GULP
コクン
NOD

SEVEN YEARS AGO ...
...I CLOSED MY ACADEMY IN AKASAKA AND PARTED COMPANY WITH LORD SEITAROU.
HAVING ENDED MY CORRESPONDENCE WITH HIM, I FIND MYSELF TURNING HERE FOR ANSWERS.
CLENCH
I PRAY THAT YOU WILL HEED MY WORDS, FOR I WISH URGENTLY TO MEET WITH HIM.
PLEASE, WHERE IS LORD SEITAROU NOW...?
MM ...
MMPH ...
MMFH ...!

NNNGH...
STRUGGLE
SNAP
GASP
HEH...
WHAT SPIRIT YOU HAVE.
KFF!
KOFF!
I THOUGHT I'D SPOTTED A BUZZING LITTLE FLY...
HAVE YOU COME TO AVENGE SAKAMOTO?
WENCH.
DON'T ASSUME I'M LIKE YOU!
SHIKYOU KAWASE!

THAT MAN SAVED MY LIFE...AND I WON'T DEVOTE THAT LIFE TO ANYTHING AS PETTY AS REVENGE!
TO TELL THE TRUTH, I NEVER WANTED TO LAY EYES ON YOU AGAIN!
BUT THAT WOULDN'T HELP ANYONE, SO...
HEH...
CHK
WHAT DO YOU WANT, THEN?
WHAT CAN A HELPLESS LITTLE GIRL LIKE YOU ACCOMPLISH?
SO...?
...TO UNDERSTAND YOUR SUFFERING!
I CAN TRY...

HEH...
HEH... HA HA HA HA!
DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH.
WHAT SORT OF JOKE IS—
SEITA-ROU-HAN!
ピタッ!
FLINCH
I KNEW IT.
THERE REALLY IS SOME LINK BETWEEN YOU, SAGARA-HAN, AND THIS SEITA-ROU-HAN!
...WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD?
WENCH?
NOTH-ING!
BUT...

...WHEN YOU RAISED YOUR HAND AGAINST RYOUMA-HAN...
...YOUR VOICE...
...IT SOUNDED SO VERY SAD.
DON'T SPEAK AS IF YOU UNDER-STAND ME!!
FLUTTER
I, DON'T... AT ALL.
BUT I SHOULD LIKE TO ALL THE SAME.

DRIP
TELL ME ABOUT YOUR PAST.
I'LL HELP YOU BEAR IT...SO PLEASE...
YOU CAN TRUST IN ME.
"NII-SAN!
"YOU CAN TRUST IN ME!"
"...GET OUT OF HERE, QUICK, NII-SAN!
"I'LL TAKE CARE OF MOTHER, SO..."

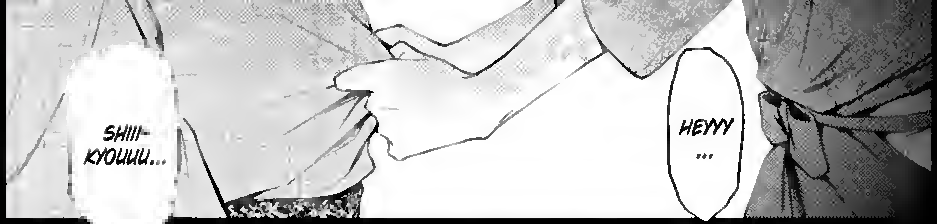
WHACK
CRACK
EEK!
DAMN YOU!
STAGGER
WHAT DO YOU KNOW!?
MY SUFFERING HAS BEEN...
SHI... KYOU ...?
THAT'S RIGHT ...
YOU UNDERSTAND NOTHING ...!
KOJIMA-SAN ...
...I SEE YOU WERE UNAWARE AFTER ALL, BUT...
...REALIZE WHAT HAPPENED TO US...
... THANKS TO SAGARA ...NO... SHIROU KOJIMA ...?
DO YOU...

...I SHALL TELL YOU.
WHAT HAPPENED TO MY HUSBAND, SEITAROU...
...AFTER HE LEFT YOUR ACADEMY...

SEITAROU IS DEAD.
... HUH ...?

HE CARELESSLY STEALS WHAT OTHERS TREASURE ...
... USES THEM ...
...AND LIVES ONLY FOR HIS OWN SAKE.
THAT'S THE SORT OF MAN HE IS.
...
SEI... TAROU-SAN... IS...?
YES ... IT HAPPENED WITHIN TWO YEARS OF THE DAY YOU PARTED.
"SA-GARA"... HE MAY HAVE CHANGED HIS NAME, BUT HIS NATURE IS THE SAME AS EVER.
SOMEDAY, YOU'LL BE USED AND DISCARDED BY HIM AS WELL.
YOU'LL MEET THE SAME FATE.

HE'LL KILL YOU...
...THE WAY HE KILLED SEITA-ROU ...!


SHIII-
KYOUUU...
HEYYY
...

YOU'RE SUCH A MEANIE, SHIKYOU!
POUT

.....
DRAG
ズル
DRAG
ズル
DRAG
ズル
TEACH ME ABOUT THAT THEORY OF WHATEVER-IT-WAS TOO!

YOU'RE HOPELESS.
YANK
AWW!

Chapter 20

WOW! FANCY RICE CAKES!
DON'T MIND IF I DO!
HE'S SUCH...
...A FOOL.

.....
HERE, TAKE THIS AND GO AWAY.
ゴソゴソ
RUMMAGE
RUMMAGE
TOSS
HUH?
WHAT IS IT!?
ぽおっ
GLOW

LEARNING SWORDPLAY IS QUITE ENOUGH FOR HIM.
HMPH!
DID YOU TURN HIM DOWN AGAIN TODAY?
SEITAROU IS QUITE EAGER TO STUDY AT OUR ACADEMY, ISN'T HE?
THE MIYASAKA NAME AND THE KAWASE NAME ARE EACH HONORED TO BEAR ONE CHARACTER FROM THE OMIYA HIKAWA SHRINE.
OUR FAMILIES HAVE PROTECTED THIS PLACE ALONGSIDE THE GOD OF HIKAWA SINCE ANCIENT TIMES.
YOU MUST BE A FRIEND TO HIM AND TRY NOT TO BREAK THE LONG-STANDING BOND BETWEEN OUR FAMILIES.
BUT ...
...WE DON'T HAVE A BOND...
... APART FROM BEING ... ...A MIYASAKA AND A KAWASE...

WE'RE NOT FRIENDS ...
!
YOU SHOULD BE FRIENDS BECAUSE OF WHO YOU TWO ARE.
I SUP-POSE NOT.
...A FOOL...
...WHO LIKES EVERY-ONE, THAT'S ALL.
HE'S JUST ...
WE'RE JUST ...
.....
...MERELY LOOK AFTER HIM.

Chapter 20:
A Cycle of Misunderstandings

SEITA-ROU-HAN...
...WAS KILLED BY SAGARA-HAN...!?
YOU'RE LYING!
SAGARA-HAN'S BEEN WONDER-ING WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED TO SEITAROU-HAN ALL THIS TIME—
I TOLD YOU, HE CARES NOTHING FOR OTHERS!
THAT'S JUST THE SORT OF THING THAT ARROGANT BASTARD WOULD SAY!

BUT THIS IS THE BRUTAL TRUTH...
IF IT WERE NOT FOR THAT MAN...
...SEI-TAROU WOULD NEVER HAVE DIED!
IF IT WASN'T ...
CLENCH
...FOR THAT MAN...
1858 A.D.
SHI-KYOUUU!
I...
...FINALLY GOT INTO AN ACADEMY!
HAVEN'T I TOLD YOU AND TOLD YOU WE WOULDN'T ADMIT YOU?
YEAH, I KNOW!
TILL MY EARS BLED!
THAT'S WHY IT'S NOT YOUR SCHOOL!
I'M GONNA GO TO AN ACADEMY IN EDO!

AH...
YEAH, SEE, THIS GUY I BUMPED INTO SAID HE RUNS AN ACADEMY IN EDO!
HE'S CALLED SHIROU KOJIMA, Y'KNOW?
I FIGURED IT HAD TO BE FATE, SO I ASKED HIM TO ADMIT ME, AND RIGHT AWAY HE SAID HE'D—
HOPE-LESS!
YOU'RE...
...HOPE-LESS!!
YOU CAN'T...
...PICK UP WISDOM LIKE IT'S A MERE GAME...
"THEY SAY THAT FAMILY'S ACADEMY PROFESSES IMPERIAL LOYALISM..."
"I WONDER WHAT WICKED-NESS THEY'RE PLOTTING?"
"IT'LL BE NO LAUGHING MATTER IF THEY BRING THE SHOGUNATE DOWN ON OUR VILLAGE..."
"HE THINKS HE'S BETTER THAN US JUST BECAUSE HE'S BEEN TO SCHOOL!"
"GET OUT OF HERE!"

...WAS THE LAST TIME I SAW HIS SMILE...

...NOW THAT I THINK OF IT.

YOU MUST BE KUNIKIDA KAWASE.
CLATTER
KNOCK
KNOCK
KNOCK
WHA ...?
SLASH
I AM, BUT...
...WHAT BUSINESS DO MY LORD OFFICIALS HAVE WITH—
YOU FILTHY LOYALIST ...
DRIP
DRIP
WALIMAP
THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS TO SAMURAI FAMILIES WHO MOCK THE TOKUGAWA CLAN!

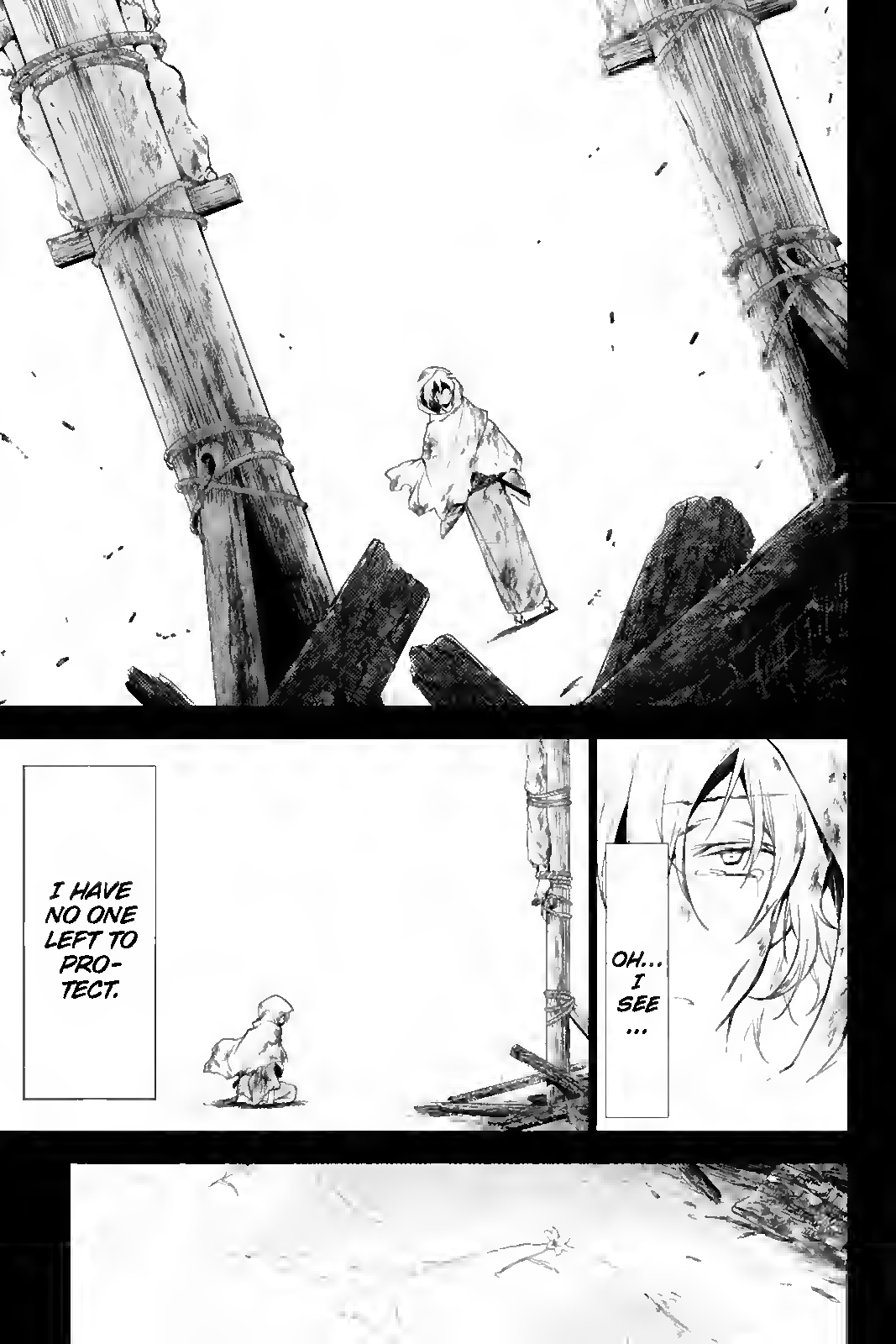
F...
FATHER ...?
FATHER!!
KCHAK
FLAP
FLAP
ZLASH
HOW...
...DARE YOU!?
AKKGH!
WHUMP

FOOM
THIS IS TREASON! BURN THEM...!
Y...
YOU BRAT ...!
BURN THE WHOLE PLACE!!
GLARE
SHUDDER
EEE ...!
RRRUMMMBLE
CUT OFF ALL ESCAPE ROUTES!
CRASH
AHH ...!
MOTHER!!

NII-SAN! YOU MUSTN'T TURN BACK! GET OUT OF HERE, QUICK!
AYANO...
BUT...!
I'LL TAKE CARE OF MOTHER, SO...
...YOU TAKE FATHER AND GET AWAY, QUICK...!
YOU CAN TRUST IN ME!!
DASH
REST HERE, FATHER...
I'LL BE BACK SOON.
SPLASH
SPLASH

GUN-SHOTS !?
FLAP
FLAP
FLAP
BLAM
NO... IT CAN'T BE...
WHIRL
HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN...?
WHY...?
SPLASH
DAMN THEM
STAY AWAY!
GET OUT OF HERE!!
FLINCH
FATHER !!
TRAMP
TRAMP
TRAMP
TRAMP
SLASH

YOU MUST LIVE...
...TO PROTECT...
...YOUR MOTHER...
...AND...
THUD
IS THERE ANOTHER ONE!?
HE MUST HAVE BROUGHT HIS SON.
FIND HIM!
DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY!!
I HAVE TO...
...PROTECT MOTHER AND AYA—
LIVE...
NO MATTER WHAT...
I HAVE TO LIVE ON...
GURGLE


I HAVE NO ONE LEFT TO PRO-TECT.
OH... I SEE ...

SEI...
...TAROU...
CLATTER
カラ カラン
PLOD
I STILL...
...HAVE HIM...
SEITAROU...
SCRAPE
THAT'S RIGHT...
SEITAROU, DON'T DO THIS...
IF YOU STUDY SOMETHING YOU SHOULDN'T, THE SHOGUNATE WILL COME AFTER YOU AS WELL.
I'M PRETTY SURE HE WENT TO SEE A MAN IN EDO CALLED SHIROU KOJIMA-SAN...
AH...
THAT'S THE MAN HE WAS TALKING ABOUT...
IF IT'S SEITAROU-SAN YOU WANT, HE'S GONE OFF TO DEVOTE HIMSELF TO HIS STUDIES.

YOU'RE ...
...ALL I HAVE LEFT.
WHAT A DIRTY BEGGAR YOU ARE! GO BOTHER SOMEONE ELSE'S CUSTOMERS! GET OUTTA HERE!
HOW SHOULD I KNOW?
HMM .. YOU ONLY KNOW HE'S CALLED "KOJIMA-SAN"?
EDO IS A BIG PLACE, DEAR.
HEY THERE, PAL.
LOOKIN' FOR SOMEONE?
SLAM

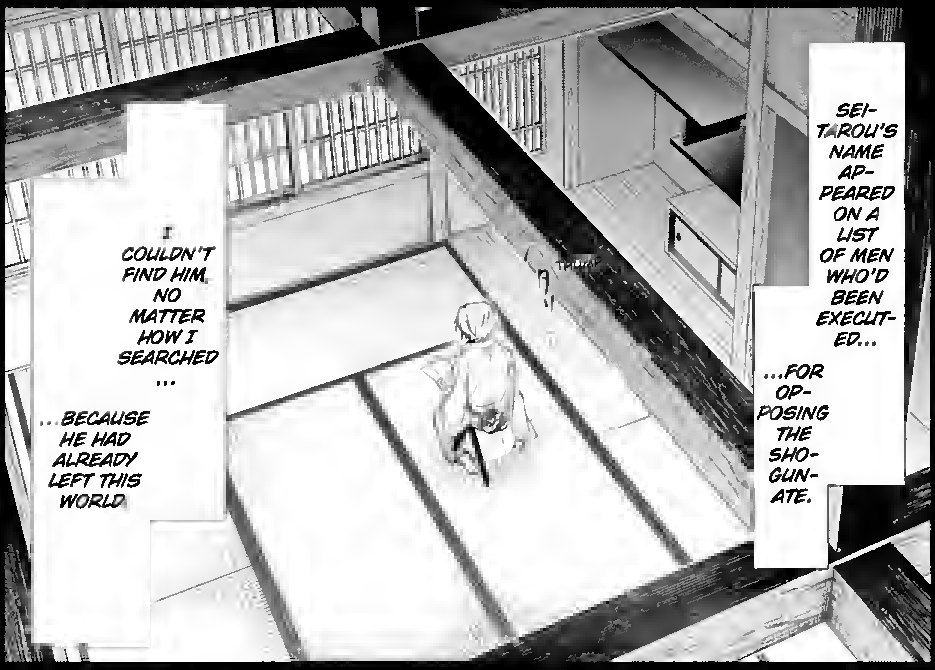
I'D DO...
...ANY-THING FOR ANY-ONE.
'COURSE, I AIN'T OFFERIN' FOR FREE...

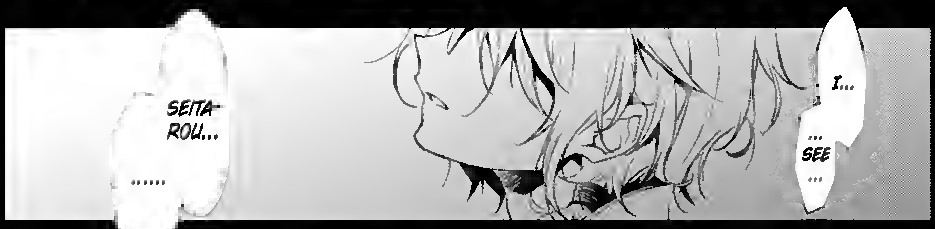
NEED A HAND?

ANY-THING ...
ANY-THING ASKED OF ME.

IF ONLY THEY'D HELP BRING ME TO SEITA-ROU.
I'D DO ANY-THING.

I...
WHERE ARE YOU?
SEITA-ROU...
...HAD TO PROTECT HIM.
GENJI 1 (1864 A.D.)
CRINKLE
SEITA-ROU...
...IS DEAD...?


SEI-TAROU'S NAME AP-PEARED ON A LIST OF MEN WHO'D BEEN EXECUT-ED...
...FOR OP-POSING THE SHO-GUN-ATE.
I COULDN'T FIND HIM, NO MATTER HOW I SEARCHED ...
...BECAUSE HE HAD ALREADY LEFT THIS WORLD.
TRMBL
?!


I... ... SEE ...
SEITA-ROU... .....

SHI-ROU KOJI-MA... IS HE DEAD AS WELL ...?
RUSTLE
...!?
TRMBL
TRMBL
.....
HIS NAME ISN'T HERE!?

WHY... WHY WASN'T HE AT SEITA-ROU'S SIDE!?
WHY WAS HE SPARED?
WHY HIM ALONE!?
DOES THIS MEAN HE CAST SEITAROU ASIDE TO SAVE HIM-SELF!?
AFTER THAT, I TRIED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MAN CALLED "SHIROU KOJIMA."
DESPITE ALL MY CONNEC-TIONS, I'D BEEN UNABLE TO FIND OUT ANY-THING ABOUT HIM, BUT...
...WHEN I COM-MITTED EVERY COIN AND TOOL AT MY DISPOSAL TO THE CAUSE, I FINALLY ACQUIRED SOME INFORMA-TION...
"SHIROU ZAEMON MASU-MITSU KOJIMA...
"THE WEALTHY KOJIMA MERCHANT FAMILY HAS LEVIED HEAVY LAND TAXES AND PROVIDED LARGE LOANS TO MANY DAIMYO...
"...AND HAS BROUGHT SHAME TO MANY EVEN WITHIN THE SHOGUN-ATE..."
HEH...
HEH... HA HA HA HA...
HA...
FLUTTER
WHAT SICK JOKE IS THIS!?
SLAM

MY FAMILY...
...AND SEITA-ROU...
...PAID WITH THEIR LIVES!
SO WHY, AGAINST ALL REASON...
...IS THIS BASTARD STILL LIVING, SAFE AND SOUND!?
IF HE...
...HADN'T TAUGHT THAT TRASH TO SEITAROU...
SLAM
SLAM
SLAM
SLAM
IF HE...
...HADN'T STOLEN SEITAROU AWAY FROM ME...

I TRIED TO...

...PROTECT HIM, BUT...

NO HOPE, NO PRIDE ...

I HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE.

I'LL USE THE CURSED SHOGUNATE FOR MY OWN ENDS...

I WILL HAVE MY REVENGE.

I'LL MAKE YOU TASTE THE SAME DESPAIR I'VE SUFFERED!!

TH..
THAT'S
.....
THAT'S NOT..
IT
...ISN'T..
I'M SURE SEITAROU-HAN WOULD NOT HAVE HELD HIM RESPONSI-BLE!
IT WASN'T SAGARA-HAN'S FAULT!
SHUT UP
BUT ISN'T IT THE TRUTH!?
SAGARA-HAN DIDN'T KILL HIM! YOU'RE WRONG!
BE QUIET...
IT WASN'T ANY-ONE'S FAULT AT ALL!
IT WASN'T SAGARA-HAN'S FAULT OR SEITAROU-HAN'S FAULT...!
I TOLD YOU...
...TO SHUT—

IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT ...
EITHER ..
THUMP
ストー
HIC
WHY ARE — YOU CRYING ?
I DON'T WANT YOUR PITY —
THAT'S NOT IT...

I HATE YOU SO MUCH I'D LIKE TO KILL YOU.
I DON'T PITY YOU...
...TO BELIEVE THAT I NEEDN'T DO SUCH THINGS.
BUT SOME-ONE TAUGHT ME...
BUT ... ... YOU ...
YOU WERE ...
...SO ALONE FOR SO LONG...
YOU WERE SO WILD WITH SORROW ...
...HATING SOMEONE SO IN-TENSELY...
...WAS THE ONLY WAY YOU KNEW TO SOOTHE YOUR ACHING HEART.

PLEASE STOP...
EVEN IF YOU BEAR IT ALONE...
SWINGING A SWORD AROUND LIKE THIS WON'T HEAL YOUR HEART...
HAVEN'T YOU REALIZED THAT BY NOW?

I KNOW ...
...THAT YOU LOVED SEITA-ROU-HAN.

WHAT
. DO YOU .
KNOW ?

SHOVE

AHH...
WHY...?
I CAN'T WATCH YOU KEEP WOUNDING YOUR OWN HEART BY WOUNDING OTHERS!
I KNOW AS WELL AS YOU HOW MUCH IT HURTS...
...TO LOSE A LOVED ONE.
NO ONE HAS EVER SAID THEM TO ME. HOW...
IT WASN'T YOUR ... FAULT.
THOSE WORDS...
HOW DID THIS WENCH KNOW WHAT TO SAY?
I...
...WON'T LET YOU USE YOUR BLADE TO HURT PEOPLE ANYMORE!

I'LL...
...BECOME A SHEATH FOR YOUR BLADE...!

"A REBEL AGAINST THE SHOGUNATE"...
THE TRUTH IS, HE WAS "SUSPECTED OF STUDYING LOYALISM AND INCITING UNREST AGAINST THE SHOGUNATE."
IF HE HADN'T STUDIED UNDER YOU...
...SEITAROU MIGHT NEVER HAVE DIED.
I ADMIT...
...WHEN I THOUGHT OF THAT...
...I OFTEN WANTED TO CURSE YOUR NAME.
BUT...
...HE'D SEEMED SO HAPPY EVER SINCE HE MET YOU...
"HEY, I MET A GUY CALLED SHIROU AT HIKAWA SHRINE TODAY!"
"SHIROU IS REALLY SOMETHING! I'M SO LUCKY I CAN STUDY WITH HIM!"
AND WHEN HE RETURNED FROM EDO AND SET OUT AGAIN...
IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO ME...
...SOMEDAY, SHIROU MIGHT COME ASKING AFTER ME.
IF HE DOES, COULD YOU GIVE HIM THIS?

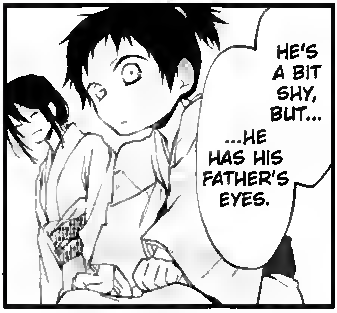
OH NO ...
PLEASE, YOU MUST COME HOME SAFELY!
I SAID IF SOMETHING HAPPENS!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY! I'LL BE FINE!
PAT
EVEN ON THE OFF CHANCE SOMETHING BAD DOES HAPPEN ...
...I KNOW SHIROU IS SURE TO CREATE A WORLD...
...WHERE OUR BABY CAN LIVE HAPPILY!
IT'S ALL RIGHT TO CRY FOR ME WHEN I DIE!
BUT DON'T HOLD ANY GRUDGES OR GIVE IN TO DESPAIR!
I'M LIVING THE WAY I'VE ALWAYS WANTED!
I'M SO GRATEFUL TO EVERYONE WHO'S HELPED ME DO IT!
...
SLIDE スー!
UM..
MAMA?

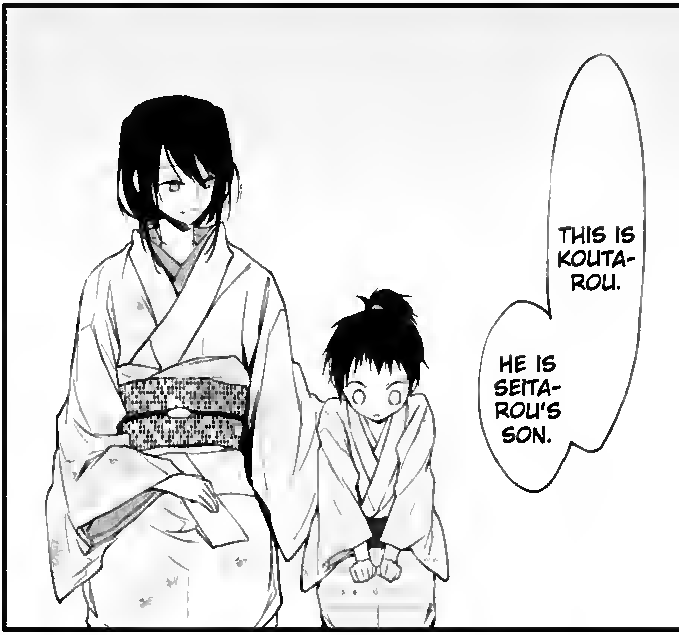
OH, THANK YOU, DEAR.
UM... WHO ARE THOSE PEOPLE?

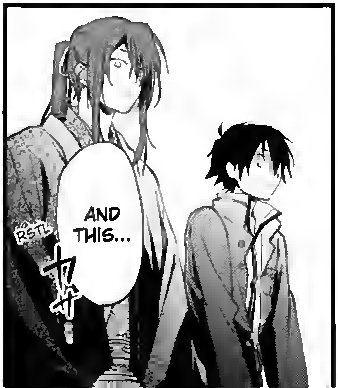
I'VE BROUGHT WHAT YOU ASKED FOR...

SCAMPER
HIDE

THEY'RE FRIENDS OF YOUR FATHER. YOU NEEDN'T BE AFRAID. COME HERE.


HE'S A BIT SHY, BUT...
...HE HAS HIS FATHER'S EYES.


THIS IS KOUTA-ROU.
HE IS SEITA-ROU'S SON.


AND THIS...
RSTL

"DEAR SHIROU,
...IS A LETTER SEITAROU LEFT FOR YOU.
"I'M SURE HE'LL LOVE YOU AS MUCH AS I DO.
"HE CAN BE A LITTLE ORNERY, BUT HE'S GOT A STRONG HEART.
"IF YOU CAME TO MY VILLAGE, BE SURE AND GO SEE SHIKYOU.
"BUT DON'T WORRY, MY HEART WILL ALWAYS BE WITH YOU!
"IF YOU'RE READING THIS LETTER, I MUST HAVE FOUGHT MY VERY LAST BATTLE.
"SORRY ABOUT THIS.

GRUMPLE
SEI-TAROU...
"...AND FREE FROM SUFFER-ING?"
"...OF CRE-TING A WORLD WHERE THE WEAK CAN LIVE HAPPILY...
"...PLEASE, COULD YOU TWO FULFILL OUR DREAM...
"IF YOU DO MEET UP WITH SHIKYOU ..."

THAT LETTER ...
...IS HIS LAST MEMENTO.

YOUR DEAR SEITAROU WAS ALWAYS BY YOUR SIDE.
HE NEVER HELD A MOMENT'S GRUDGE AGAINST YOU.
THAT'S WHY..
...IF YOU CAN ...
...PLEASE CARRY ON HIS WILL AND DON'T LET ANYTHING HINDER YOU.
SO THAT THIS CHILD ...
...CAN INHERIT THE HAPPY FUTURE THAT HE DREAMED OF.
PLEASE ...
IF YOU CAN ...
I...
UH...
KCHAK
SNIFFLE!
HERE ...!!

SHFF
THESE SWORDS ...!
NOD
SNRF!
UNH...
THOSE SWORDS ...
...SAVED MY LIFE MORE TIMES THAN I CAN COUNT.
NGH
I JUST KNOW THEY'LL PROTECT ...
PROTECT YOUR FAMILY... ... FROM NOW ON...
SNFF!
NH...
GH...

YES ...
HUG
THANK YOU...
THANK YOU.

YOU KNOW, MARU-HASHI-KUN...
WE'VE GOTTA PROTECT THE CITY AND ALL, BUT WE SATSUMA ROSHI SHOULDN'T FORGET HOW TO SMILE, RIGHT?
SO NO BLANK LOOKS AL-LOWED!
C'MON, SMILE!
SHUT UP, YAMA-DA.
NO HARSH WORDS ALLOWED EITHER!

LANTERN. GATE

HMM ...?
I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU BUCKLE DOWN. EVER.
AW, C'MON! IF YOU DON'T RELAX WHEN YOU CAN, YOU CAN'T BUCKLE DOWN WHEN YOU NEED TO!
NOT LIS-TEN-ING.
DON'T CALL ME MARU-CHAN
YOU'RE A REAL GROUCH, YOU KNOW THAT, MARU-CHAN?
SIGHooo

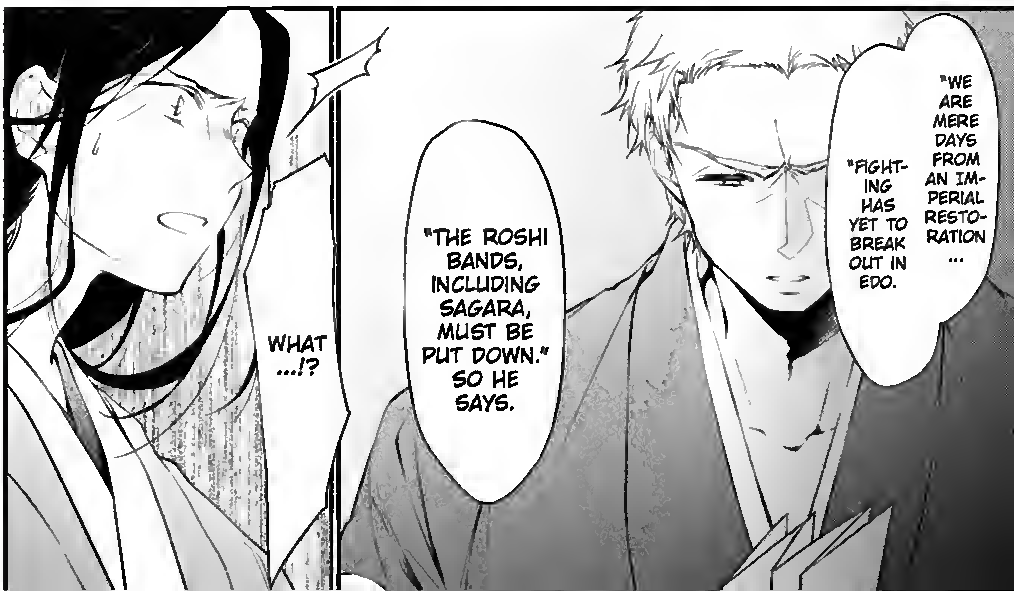
IS THAT ...
NAI-TOU !?
♪ FWOO-HOO!
NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE HIM COMING OUTTA THE YOSHI-WARA!
DAMN!
I ALWAYS FIGURED NAITOU-KUN WAS TOO SERIOUS TO GO TO THE RED-LIGHT DIST—
WILL YOU ...
...BE QUIET ?
!

LANTERNS FRONT GATE

Chapter 21: Feelings Teetering on the Brink

SLIDE
スー!

THUMP
スト
... MESSAGE FROM SAIGOU-SAN IN THE CAPITAL?
AN-OTHER ...


"WE ARE MERE DAYS FROM AN IM-PERIAL RESTO-RATION ...
"FIGHT-ING HAS YET TO BREAK OUT IN EDO.
"THE ROSHI BANDS, INCLUDING SAGARA, MUST BE PUT DOWN." SO HE SAYS.
WHAT ...!?

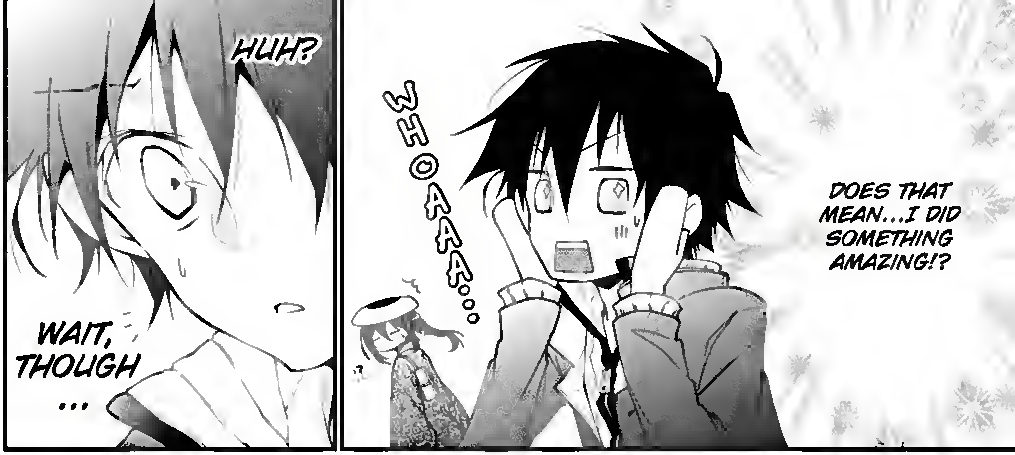
HE WANTS SAGA-RA SHOT ...!?
SAGARA HAS BEEN NOTHING BUT RELIABLE AND HELPFUL TO US, BUT FOR THE ORDERS TO BURN EDO PALACE! AND WITH EDO IN SUCH DANGER ...!
YOU CANNOT TELL ME SAIGOU-SAN HAS FORGOT-TEN THAT!
HE MUST BE UNDER PRESSURE FROM LORD IWAKURA.
THE SATSUMA MUST NOT BE BROUGHT TO A HALT NOW.
IN THAT CASE ...
...WHAT ON EARTH WILL WE DO, IMUTA ...?
MASU-MITSU.
I DON'T WANT TO ATTACK LORD SAGARA EITHER.
AND YET...
...I CAN'T CAUSE ANY MORE TROUBLE FOR LORD SAGARA... OR THE SATSUMA.
WHICH MEANS WE'RE THE ONLY ONES WHO...!
IF WE MOVE NOW...
...WE MAY HAVE A FEW HOURS YET BEFORE SAGARA-SAN RETURNS FROM OOMIYA TO THE MANSION.
GULP
!!
?
...

I SHALL MUSTER THE SATSUMA ARMY!
THAT WENT WELL, HUH?
SAGA-RA?

I MEAN...
...WHAT HAPPENED TO SEITAROU-SAN WAS TOO BAD, BUT...
...YOU FINALLY FACED UP TO WHAT YOU'D BEEN AVOID-ING...
...AND YOU GOT SEITA-ROU'S LAST LETTER.
HOW DO I PUT IT ...?
IT'S LIKE YOU CAN FINALLY MOVE ON.
... YES.
HOWEVER, THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT ANYTHING HAS BEEN SOLVED.
THE CREATION OF THE WORLD WE DREAMED OF, ONE WHERE THE WEAK WOULD BE SAFE...
...AND THE PROBLEM OF SHIKYOU KAWASE... I HAVE YET TO TRULY FACE THEM.
YEAH ...
DO YOUR BEST, OKAY?
I'LL DO EVERY-THING I CAN TO HELP YOU...
...AND I KNOW THE ROSHI WILL TOO.
I AM IN YOUR DEBT.

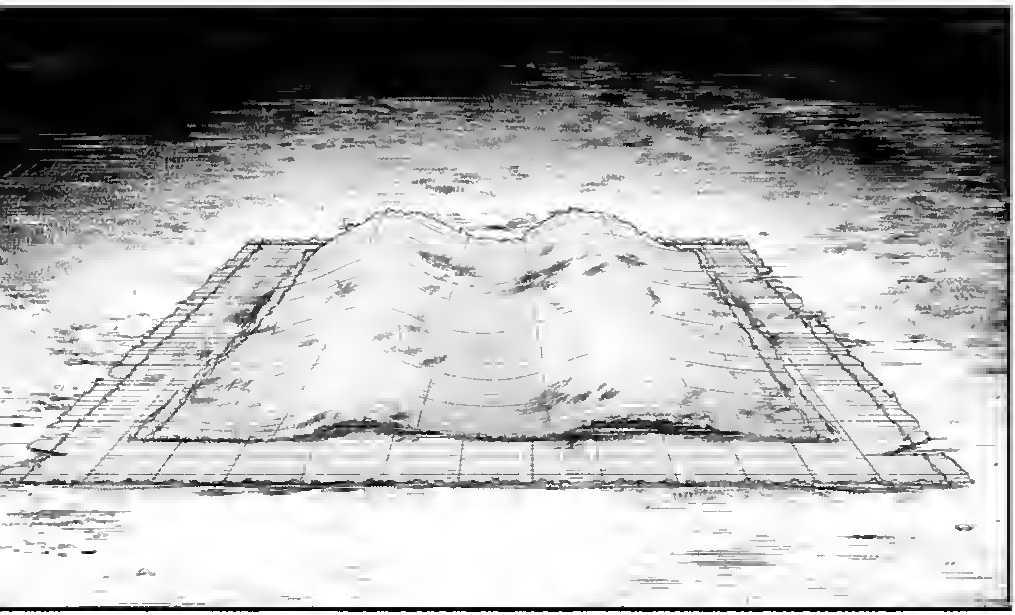
BUT YOU KNOW...
...IT'S GREAT THAT SEITAROU-SAN'S WIFE WAS SO NICE, HUH?
YES ...
SHE TRULY WAS...
AND I DUNNO IF I LEARNED MUCH, BUT...
...I'M GLAD I GAVE HER SEITAROU'S SWORDS AS A KEEPSAKE.
THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THESE SWORDS ...
ER... WHAT IS YOUR NAME...?
OH! I'M KOTETSU MI—
ACK! NO!
JUST ...
JUST KOTE-TSU!
I ALMOST SAID "MIYASAKA"!
THAT WAS CLOSE ...
I SEE ...
KO-TE-TSU-KUN ...
STARE
?

I-I'M SO SORRY! THAT'S NOT IT...
IT'S JUST ...
OH!
UH... IS THERE SOME-THING ON MY FACE ...?
YOU REMIND ME OF HIM A LITTLE.
THAT DIRECT GAZE OF YOURS... IT'S VERY LIKE MY HUSBAND'S.
OH DEAR ...
I REALLY AM SORRY. PAY ME NO MIND.
"I'LL HAND DOWN YOUR MEMORY AND THESE SWORDS IN OUR FAMILY. WE'LL NEVER FORGET YOU...."
"...LITTLE SAMURAI-SAN."
I GUESS SHE'S ONE OF MY ANCES-TORS, HUH?
HUH? THAT MEANS ...
...THE PERSON WHO GAVE THOSE SWORDS TO THE MIYASAKA FAMILY, TO PASS DOWN UNTIL THE PRESENT. ...
...WAS ME!?
!?


HUH?
WAIT, THOUGH ...
WHOAAA...
DOES THAT MEAN...I DID SOMETHING AMAZING!?

SO THAT MEANS... WHAT DOES IT MEAN!?
B-BUT... THEY BELONGED TO THE MIYASAKAS BEFORE I WENT BACK IN TIME (IN AN INFINITE LOOP)...
...THEY WOULD HAVE KEPT ON BELONGING TO SAGARA FOREVER ...
BUT IF I HADN'T HANDED THE SWORDS OVER JUST NOW, THEN...
YEAH... THAT'S SO WEIRD!
...ISN'T IT WEIRD THAT THOSE SWORDS WERE ALREADY IN THE FAMILY BEFORE I WENT BACK IN TIME...!?
IF I'M THE ONE WHO GAVE THOSE SWORDS TO THE MIYASAKA FAMILY...
HUH ...!?
WHAT!?
DIZZY
DIZZY
DIZZY

I'D BETTER STOP THINKING ABOUT IT.
K-KOTE-TSU...
IT'S STILL A LONG WAY TO EDO...I'M GOING ON AHEAD.
SOME THINGS IN THIS WORLD ARE BEYOND ME.
OH! R-RIGHT!



I'M SORRY, CAPTAIN SAGARA ...
WE WERE SUCH FOOLS ...
SHFF
SA... GARA ...?
WHAT'S GOING ON...?

YAMA-DA...
MARU-HASHI ...
WE THOUGHT WE COULD WAIT FOR YOU TO GET BACK AND PASS JUDGMENT, BUT ...
...IT ENDED UP LIKE THIS INSTEAD ...
WHAT HAP-PENED? TELL ME EVERY-THING FROM THE BEG—
IT WAS ALL OUR FAULT ...
IF WE'D BEEN PROP-ERLY ON OUR GUARD ...
... NAITOU WOULD NEVER HAVE...!
HUH...?

WHAT?
DASH
THAT'S...
HEY!
MIYA-SAKA, DON'T —
GRAB
NO!
IT CAN'T BE...
WHISH
NAI ...!
... NAITOU ...
... SAN ...

WHAT ...
WHAT THE HELL ...
NAITOU-SAN!
THUMP
MIYA-SA-KA...
WHY!?
HAAH...

LAST NIGHT...
SNEAK
SNEAK
HEY, MARU...
DON'T CALL ME MARU.
WHO CARES IF NAITOU WAS IN THE RED-LIGHT DISTRICT? HE'S A MAN, AFTER ALL.
NOT LISTENING...
BUT ISN'T IT WEIRD THAT HE LEFT THE YOSHIWARA, THAT PRISON FOR COURTESANS... WITH A WOMAN?
YES...
.....
PERHAPS...
...HE PAID OFF HER CONTRACT AND FREED HER...
WHAT!?
PAID OFF... WHERE WOULD HE GET THAT KINDA MONEY!?
I WANT SOME!
NAITOU GOT HOME PRETTY LATE LAST NIGHT, HUH?
YES.
HE WENT OUT FOR A MEAL WITH THE MIYASAKA BOY AND CAME BACK LATE ALONE...

IT CAN'T BE...
HE MAY HAVE RESORTED TO ROBBERY...
.....
HEY, C'MON! NAITOU? ARE YOU SERIOUS!?
EVEN IF HE ROBBED THE MEANEST, MOST PRO-SHOGUNATE SHOPKEEPER...
...HE'D HAVE TO COMMIT SEPPUKU FOR THAT KIND OF SELFISH ACT!
WE AREN'T YET CERTAIN HE DID ANY SUCH THING...
ALSO, KEEP IT DOWN.
BUT IF THAT THEORY PROVES TO BE TRUE...
...HE MAY BE PLANNING TO ESCAPE EDO WITH HER...
...SEIZING THE MOMENT WHILE SAGARA IS OUT OF TOWN.
DON'T TAKE YOUR EYES OFF NAITOU.

THUMP
ストッ
WINCE
キュッ

SIGH...
HE REALLY DID USE THE BACK GATE...
DAMMIT, MARU...
FLINCH
CREAK
NAITOU.
PLEASE, JUST TELL ME YOURSELF.
THE INTERROGATORS AT THE MANSION WON'T BE AS NICE AS ME.
I'M SO SORRY
THUD.
I'M SO SORRY ...!
HE DIDN'T RESIST AT ALL.
HE CONFESSED TO RESORTING TO ROBBERY TO BUY HER CONTRACT..
...APOLOGIZING ALL THE WHILE

THE USUAL PENALTY IS COMMITTING SEPPUKU ON THE SPOT ...
...BUT WE DID NOT WISH TO ACT RASHLY, SO WE LOCKED HIM IN AN OUTBUILDING TO AWAIT YOUR RETURN.
BEFORE LONG, THE WOMAN WAITING FOR HIM REALIZED THAT HE HAD FAILED TO ESCAPE AND CAME LOOKING FOR HIM.
SHE TOO BOWED HER HEAD AGAIN AND AGAIN AND BEGGED OUR PARDONS.
SHE HAD NO IDEA THE MONEY FOR HER CONTRACT WAS STOLEN.
"HOW COULD HE DO THAT FOR MY SAKE?" SHE SOBBED, SO PITIFULLY THAT I COULDN'T HELP BUT BRING HER TO THE OUTBUILDING WHERE NAITOU WAS.
I TOOK ALL THEIR POSSESSIONS TO PREVENT ANY FURTHER ISSUES.
I THOUGHT I'D BEEN WATCHFUL.
BUT EVEN SO...

WE SHALL
LIVE ON
ETERNALLY
TOGETHER

WE SHALL LIVE ON ETERNALLY TOGETHER
I NEVER ...
... SHOULD HAVE LEFT THEM ALONE!

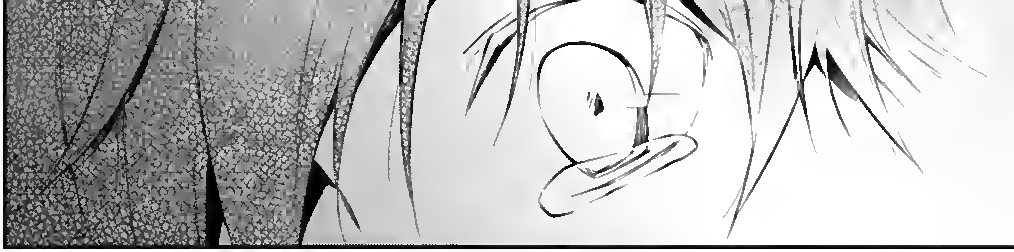
AND NAITOU WAS SO NICE, SO...
...I TOLD HIM, "IT'S OKAY," AND "DO YOUR BEST"...
IT'S ALL MY FAULT FOR SAYING STUPID STUFF LIKE THAT!
HE SAID ...
...THERE WAS SOME-BODY HE WANTED TO HELP...
IT'S ...
...MY FAULT.

YOU'RE WRONG!
NAITOU-SAN WAS... A KIND PERSON... AND SO MUCH STRONGER THAN ME...
BUT WHAT HAPPENED HERE WAS CAUSED BY THE WEAKNESS OF HIS OWN HEART—
TRUE, YOUR WORDS MIGHT HAVE STRENGTH-ENED NAITOU'S RESOLVE.
IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT.

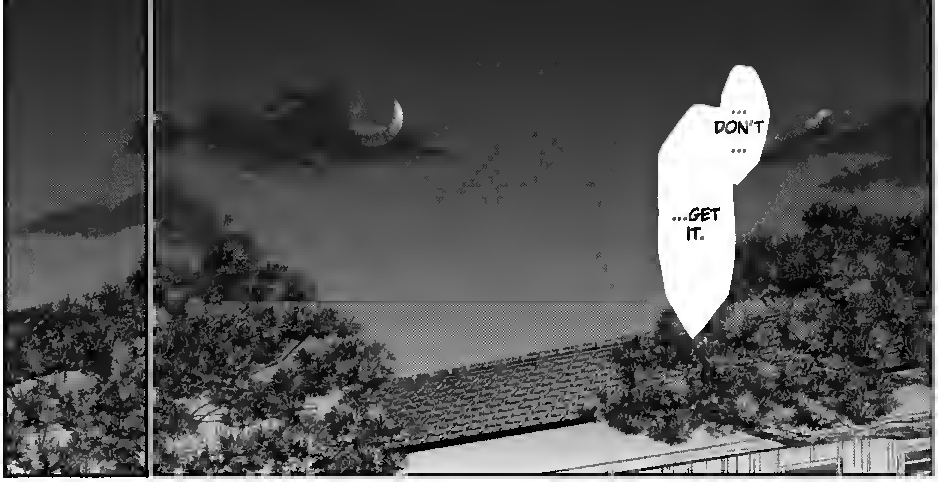
NAITOU
...
...WAS KIND, ALL RIGHT.

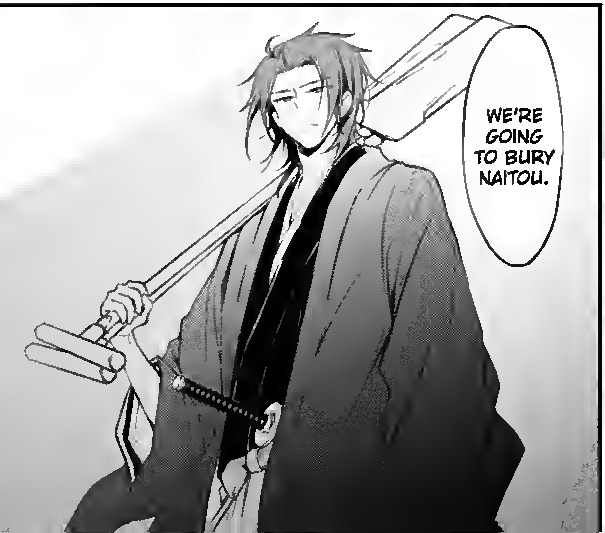
BUT HE WASN'T REALLY HELPING THAT WOMAN.
THAT'S EXACTLY WHY HE REACHED OUT TO HELP HER.

HE WAS SAVING HIMSELF BY RESCUING ANOTHER.



I...

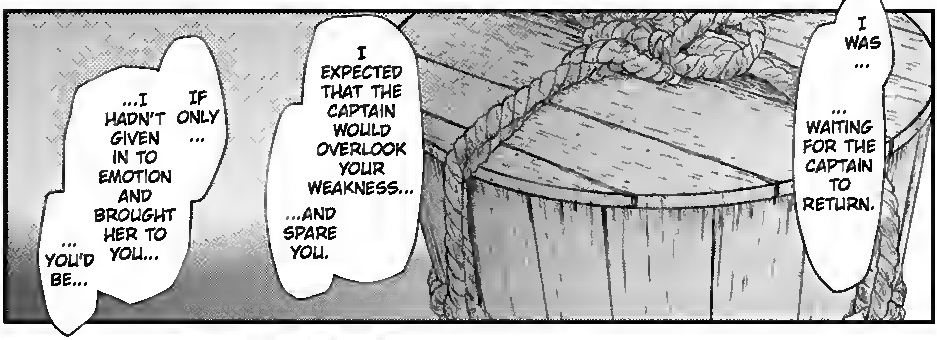

...
DON'T
...
...GET
IT.


WE'RE
GOING
TO BURY
NAITOU.

I
THOUGHT
THIS
MIGHT BE
WHERE
YOU'D
RUN OFF
TO.
SAVED
ME
HAVING
TO
SEARCH.

SHNK

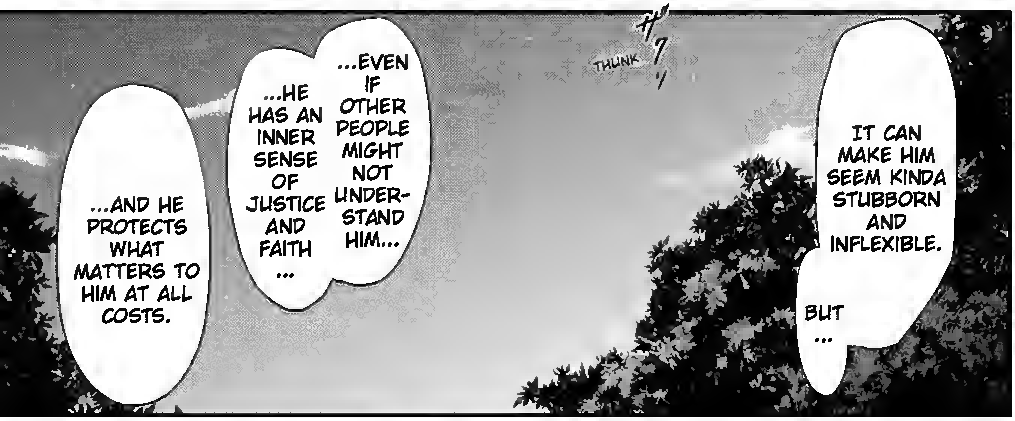
NAI-TOU ...
...I'M THE ONE WHO KILLED YOU.


I WAS ... ... WAITING FOR THE CAPTAIN TO RETURN.
I EXPECTED THAT THE CAPTAIN WOULD OVERLOOK YOUR WEAKNESS... ...AND SPARE YOU.
IF ONLY ... ...I HADN'T GIVEN IN TO EMOTION AND BROUGHT HER TO YOU... ... YOU'D BE...

WHAT NAITOU-SAN DID DESERVED TO BE PUNISHED.
SAGARA WOULD HAVE PUNISHED HIM.
SCRAPE

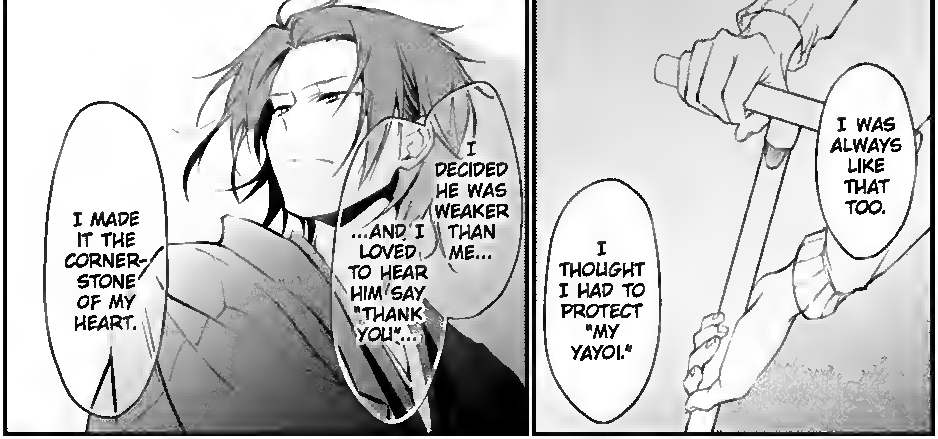
THAT'S NOT TRUE.

SAGARA IS A KIND PERSON TOO, AND HE DREAMS OF MAKING THE WORLD SAFE FOR THE WEAK...
SCRAPE
...BUT HE ISN'T JUST KIND.
HE'S ALSO STRICT, AND HE NEVER IGNORES BAD THINGS.


IT CAN MAKE HIM SEEM KINDA STUBBORN AND INFLEXIBLE.
BUT ...
THUNK
...EVEN IF OTHER PEOPLE MIGHT NOT UNDERSTAND HIM...
...HE HAS AN INNER SENSE OF JUSTICE AND FAITH ...
...AND HE PROTECTS WHAT MATTERS TO HIM AT ALL COSTS.

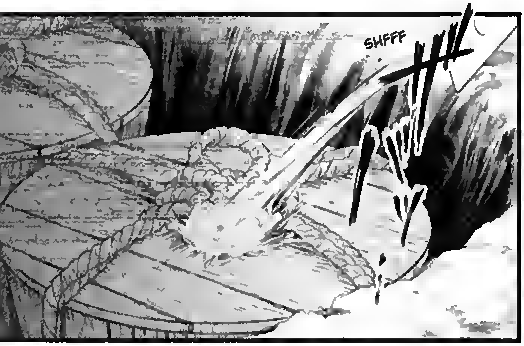
I THINK THAT MIGHT BE HIS GREATEST STRENGTH.

SORRY, YAMADA-SAN. I REALLY TOOK IT TO HEART... WHAT YOU SAID BE-FORE.
ABOUT SAVING YOUR OWN SOUL BY HELPING SOMEBODY ELSE.


I MADE IT THE CORNER-STONE OF MY HEART.
I DECIDED HE WAS WEAKER THAN ME...
...AND I LOVED TO HEAR HIM SAY "THANK YOU"...
I THOUGHT I HAD TO PROTECT "MY YAYOI."
I WAS ALWAYS LIKE THAT TOO.

...BUT MY OWN EGO MADE ME CHEER YOU ON.
I'M SORRY, NAITOU-SAN. I DENIED IT...

BECAUSE YOUR WEAKNESS ...
...WAS MY WEAKNESS TOO.


SWFFF

SNIFF...

I'M GOING TO LIVE ...
...FOR THE BOTH OF US, NAITOU.

...AND GO HOME TO YAYOI.
I'LL GET STRONG-ER...

NH...
SNIFF, SNIFF
FLINCH
WIPE
SLAM
DIN-NER'S READY.
CAN'T YOU AT LEAST KNOCK ...?

YOU'RE ALL SO... STRONG.
UNTIL NOW, I NEVER IMAGINED SOMEBODY I WAS CLOSE TO COULD DIE...
SOME-BODY I WAS EATING DINNER WITH JUST LAST NIGHT.
I DUNNO IF I'LL EVER GET USED TO IT...
NO ONE ... ... EVER REALLY GETS USED TO IT.
YOU DON'T NEED TO.
IF YOU LEARNED TO FEEL NOTHING WHEN OTHERS DIE...
...YOU'D BE A MERE BEAST WEARING A HUMAN'S SKIN.

YANK
WE ALL SIMPLY ENDURE IT.
I SEE...
SO, YOU...
MUMBLE
...REALLY ARE STRONG.
HE'S LOST HEART...
YOU'RE NOTHING BUT TROUBLE, AREN'T YOU?
SIGH...
YAYOI SAID THAT A LOT TOO.
IF I...
...HADN'T MET THE CAPTAIN, I'D HAVE ENDED UP CARING FOR NOTHING AS WELL...
SNIFF!
...
SIGH...

AAACK!
WHAT? C'MON, YOU NEVER BRING THINGS UP ON YOUR OWN LIKE THAT! TELL MEEE!
LEAVE OFF, YOU NUI-SANCE!
AH!
TH-THAT'S RIGHT! NEVER MIND THAT! LISTEN!
WHIRL
HUH?
WHAT? WHAT?!
HUH!?
ER, I MEAN ...!
WIPE WIPE
FLUSTER
WHAT?
YOSHINO NEVER CAME BACK!?
SHE VANISHED LIKE SMOKE THE MORNING YOU AND THE CAPTAIN SET OUT.
WE'VE ASKED THE CITY GUARDS TO LOOK FOR HER, BUT THERE'S BEEN NO SIGN OF HER...
SHE NEVER RE-TURNED TO THE MANSION TODAY.
YOU MUST BE KID-DING!
IT'S NOT THAT SAFE IN EDO RIGHT NOW...
WHAM
SOME-BODY!
ANY-BODY... PLEASE, OPEN THE GATES!!

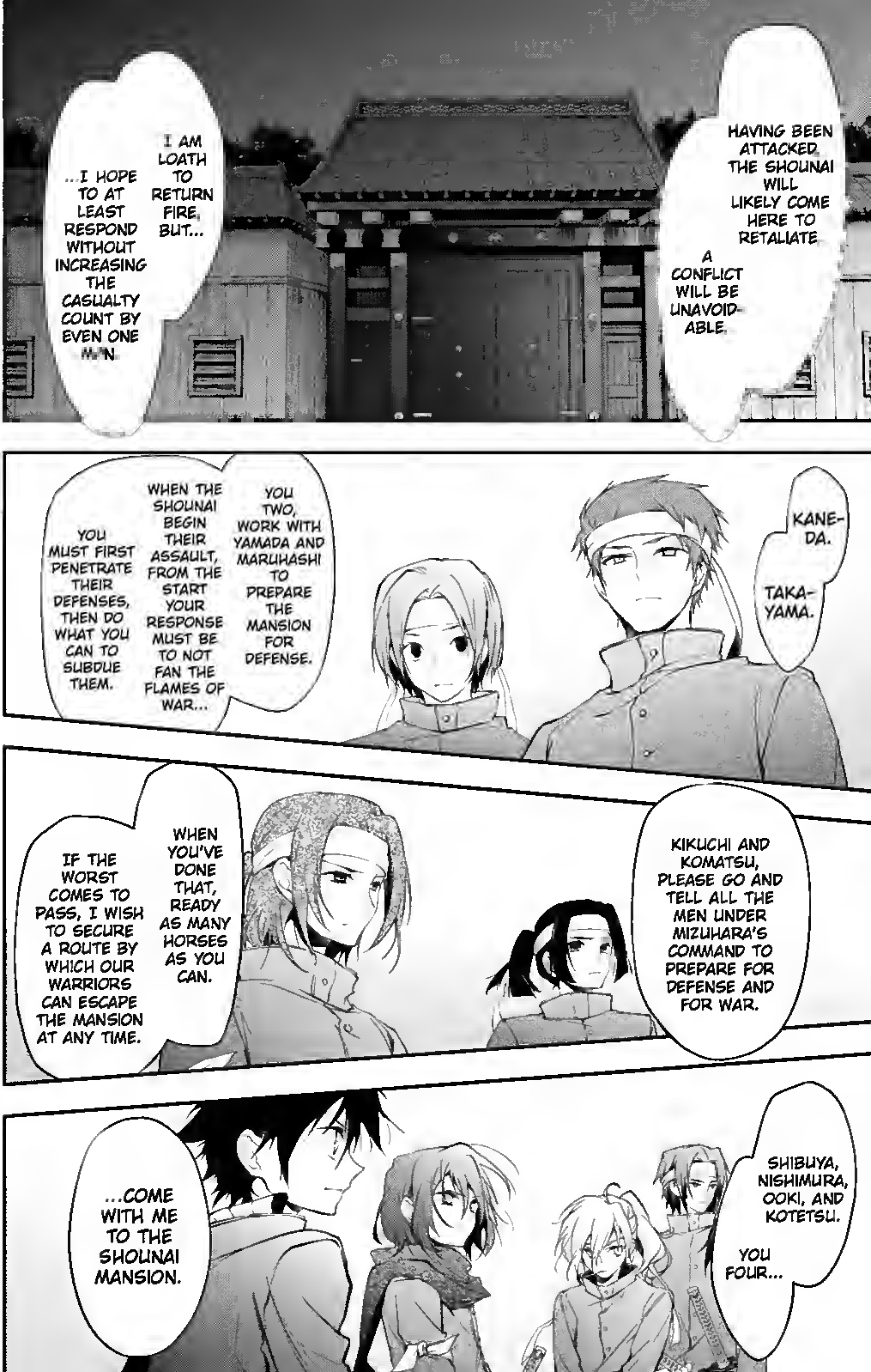
WHAM
WHAM
WHAT COULD THAT BE AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT?
SOME-ONE'S SHOUTING IN FRONT OF THE MANSION!
IT'S DREAD-FUL!
EDO CASTLE...
WHAT !?
EDO CASTLE IS ON FIRE!

TELL ME...
...IS IT TRUE THAT EDO CASTLE H...S BEEN SET ALIGHT?
YES, MY LORD SAGA-RA!
THE RUMOR IN THE CITY IS THAT THE CULPRITS ARE SATSUMA MEN!
WHAT ...!?
BUT I FIGURED YOU'D NEVER DO SUCH A THING, SIR, SO I CAME HERE...!
!!
IT CAN'T BE!
LORD IMUTA AND LORD MASUMITSU HAVE GONE ROGUE!?
ROGUE, MY LORD? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
ISN'T THIS ROSHI BAND EMPLOYED BY THE SATSUMA FACTION!?
YOU MEAN THEY WEREN'T WORKING TOGETHER!?

HAS THE TIME COME FOR ME TO CUT TIES WITH THE SATSUMA?
ALL OF YOU!
LISTEN WELL!
THE SATSUMA FACTION HAS BROKEN WITH OUR IDEALS AND TAKEN STEPS TO MOUNT A VIOLENT REBELLION!
GIVEN THIS FACT, IT SEEMS...
...THIS TURMOIL IS UNLIKELY TO END AT MERELY SETTING FIRE TO EDO CASTLE!
...
BETWEEN THE TWIN JEWELS OF THE SHOGUNATE'S SUPPORTERS—THE AIZU FACTION AND THE SHOUNAI FACTION...
...THEY'RE LIKELY TO STRIKE AT THE SHOUNAI FACTION, WHO ARE IN CHARGE OF GUARDING THE CITY OF EDO!

HAS THE TIME COME FOR ME TO CUT TIES WITH THE SATSUMA?
ALL OF YOU!
LISTEN WELL!
THE SATSUMA FACTION HAS BROKEN WITH OUR IDEALS AND TAKEN STEPS TO MOUNT A VIOLENT REBELLION!

GIVEN THIS FACT, IT SEEMS ...
...THIS TURMOIL IS UNLIKELY TO END AT MERELY SETTING FIRE TO EDO CASTLE!
BETWEEN THE TWIN JEWELS OF THE SHOGUNATE'S SUPPORTERS— THE AIZU FACTION AND THE SHOUNAI FACTION ...
... THEY'RE LIKELY TO STRIKE AT THE SHOUNAI FACTION, WHO ARE IN CHARGE OF GUARDING THE CITY OF EDO!


HAVING BEEN ATTACKED, THE SHOUNAI WILL LIKELY COME HERE TO RETALIATE.
A CONFLICT WILL BE UNAVOIDABLE.
I AM LOATH TO RETURN FIRE, BUT...
...I HOPE TO AT LEAST RESPOND WITHOUT INCREASING THE CASUALTY COUNT BY EVEN ONE MAN.
KANEDA.
TAKAYAMA.
YOU TWO, WORK WITH YAMADA AND MARUHASHI TO PREPARE THE MANSION FOR DEFENSE.
WHEN THE SHOUNAI BEGIN THEIR ASSAULT, FROM THE START YOUR RESPONSE MUST BE TO NOT FAN THE FLAMES OF WAR...
YOU MUST FIRST PENETRATE THEIR DEFENSES, THEN DO WHAT YOU CAN TO SUBDUE THEM.
KIKUCHI AND KOMATSU, PLEASE GO AND TELL ALL THE MEN UNDER MIZUHARA'S COMMAND TO PREPARE FOR DEFENSE AND FOR WAR.
WHEN YOU'VE DONE THAT, READY AS MANY HORSES AS YOU CAN.
IF THE WORST COMES TO PASS, I WISH TO SECURE A ROUTE BY WHICH OUR WARRIORS CAN ESCAPE THE MANSION AT ANY TIME.
SHIBUYA, NISHIMURA, OOKI, AND KOTETSU.
YOU FOUR...
...COME WITH ME TO THE SHOUNAI MANSION.

WE MUST REACH THE SHOUNAI MANSION BEFORE LORD MASUMITSU AND HIS SATSUMA TROOPS CAN PROVOKE THEM...
...AND DO WHATEVER WE CAN TO STOP THIS.
AL-READY ...
...IT MAY BE TOO LATE TO AVOID A WAR.
BUT THAT'S NOT TO SAY THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO.
WE MUST TRY TO REDUCE THE CIVILIAN COST, EVEN BY A LITTLE ...
RRRUMBLE
...BEFORE THE WHOLE CITY OF EDO IS SWALLOWED UP BY A SEA OF FLAMES!

SO THIS...
...IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PAWN OF THE SATSUMA ...

I'M SORRY, SAGARA ...

I ONLY WANTED TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR DREAMS, HOWEVER I COULD...
...AND YET I'VE SPILLED SATSUMA BLOOD.
HOW CAN YOU EVER FORGIVE ME?

I'M A SATSUMA MAN.

READY, AIM ...!
FIRE!!
BLAM
BLAM
BA-BLAM
READY, AIM...!
IF THE SHOGUN'S ARMY STILL HOISTS THEIR BATTLE FLAG AFTER THIS, WE'LL HAVE OUR JUST CAUSE FOR WAR!
DON'T LET UP ON THE BOM-BARD-MENT!
THIS MISSION IS OUR FIRST STEP TOWARD OVER-THROWING THEM!

KA-CLOP
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAAAM
!!!
GUN-FIRE!
COMING FROM THE SHOUNAI MANSION, NO DOUBT ...
DAMMIT ...
WE'RE TOO LATE!
SAGA-RA-SAN, WHAT NOW!?
WE'LL HURRY TO THE SHOUNAI MAN-SION...
...AND REASON WITH LORD MASU-MITSU!
THANK YOU.
I LEAVE IT TO YOU, THEN, OOKI!
AS YOU WISH!
IN THAT CASE, WE'RE RIDING PIL-LION... SEND US!
IF YOUR FASTER HORSES CAN REACH THE SHOUNAI MANSION EVEN A MOMENT SOONER ...!
AND, IF IT COMES TO IT... MAKE THE CALL TO ORDER AN EVACUA-TION.
I'M SORRY, BUT ONE OF US MUST RETURN TO THE MANSION AND TELL THEM OF THIS.
THE SHOUNAI FORCES MAY ALREADY HAVE SET OUT FOR THE SATSUMA MANSION

KA-CLOP
FIN
LORD MASU-MITSU!
SAGA-RA-SAN! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE ...?
PLEASE, CEASE FIRING IMMEDI-ATELY!
THIS WILL ONLY SPREAD MORE VIO-LENCE ...
ALL OF EDO COULD END UP IN FLAMES!
THAT IS... ...MY HOPE AND MY AIM.
LORD MASU-MITSU ...!

SAGARA-SAN.
PLEASE, TAKE YOUR MEN AND FLEE EDO.
!!?
I HAVE NO WISH FOR YOU TO DIE!
WHAT ...
...DO YOU MEAN ....
BLAAM
BLAM

FLAM
BLAAAM
BANG
BANG
THOSE SHOUNAI FELLOWS ATTACKED SOONER THAN I EXPECTED.
BANG
BLAM
BANG
STILL, DOES SAGARA-SAN HAVE THE SECOND SIGHT OR WHAT?
WHEN HE SAYS THINGS MIGHT TURN OUT SOME WAY, THEY USUALLY DO!
TAKA-YAMA
GET TO WORK.
I AM WORKING! YOU'RE HORRIBLE, KANE-CHAN.
BOOM
BOOM
!!
THEY'RE LAUNCH-ING SOME SERIOUS FIRE-POWER AT US, EH?
IT'S ON FIRE!
IS ANY-ONE IN-SIDE!?
AHHH.
AHHHH.
SEEMS THAT WAY.
BA-BA-BA-BLAM
BLAM
WHAT WILL WE DO?
THEY'RE FIRING AT US LIKE MAD TOO...
EH?
AW, JUST IGNORE 'EM.
COME ON, LET'S GO PUT THAT FIRE OUT!
YAMADA-SAN, YOU'RE GOOD AT IGNORING PEOPLE.

THIS ROSHI BAND... IT'S LIKE A FAMILY TO ME.
I'M GONNA DO WHAT I CAN TO PROTECT IT.
WE SHOULD ONLY FIGHT WHEN OUR LIVES ARE IN DANGER.
LIKE CAPTAIN SAGARA SAID, WE'RE "LOATH TO RETURN FIRE"...
KCHAK
I DON'T REALLY GET IT MYSELF.
CLUNK
"ACTING FOR THE SAKE OF WHAT I HOLD DEAR"... ...AND THINGS LIKE THAT.
HUH?
YOU'RE... ...REALLY SOME-THING... AND SO ARE THEY.
HMM...
KANE-CHAN'S FROM MY VILLAGE, AND I HEARD HE WAS JOINING A ROSHI BAND.
HIS SERIOUS NATURE IS HIS ONLY VIRTUE, SO I FIGURED HE'D GET IN TROUBLE IF LEFT TO HIMSELF.
THAT'S THE ONLY REASON I CAME ALONG.
PFFT!
WHAT?

WELL, YOU'RE ...
HEY... WHY ARE YOU LAUGH-ING?
...ACTING FOR THE SAKE OF A FRIEND YOU HOLD DEAR, RIGHT?
ROARRR

IT'S TOO LATE TO SAVE IT...
THE SATSUMA MANSION ...
YAMADA-SAN!
RIGHT, GOT IT!
IN THAT CASE, YOU'D BETTER GET GOING FIRST.
WHA ...!?
I'M GIVING THE ORDER TO EVACUATE, NOW!
THE MANSION IS A LOST CAUSE! THE CAPTAIN LEFT ME IN CHARGE IN CASE OF DISASTER!
WHILE YOU UP-AND-COMING YOUNG BUCKS ESCAPE ...
...WE OLD-TIMERS WILL KEEP THE ENEMY FORCES TIED UP! WE'LL BE ALONG LATER.
RIGHT, MARU?
WHO'RE YOU CALLING AN OLD-TIMER?
IF WE ALL RUN OFF AT ONCE, THEY'LL ROUND US UP LIKE CATTLE, YEAH?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT!? YAMADA-SAN, YOU'VE GOT TO COME WI—

HEY, YOU YOUNG-'UNS!
YEAH, OLD-TIMER?
HEY, WHO'RE YOU CALLIN' AN OLD-TIMER!?
WHAT'S KANEDA DOING?
HE WENT TO GET THE MOUNTS FOR OUR RETREAT WITH MIZUHARA-SAN.
HE'LL BE BACK SOON, I THINK.
I SEE. WELL, WHEN HE GETS BACK, TAKE HIM AND GET OUTTA HERE.
TAKE HIM? YOU MEAN, GO WITH-OUT YOU AND TH—
YEAH, WE'RE ALREADY DONE HERE.
IT'S FINE, JUST GET READY TO GO.
CREAK
BUT...I CAN'T AGREE TO—
AH!
RUMBLE
LOOK OUT!

CRASH
NGH...
THAT HURT...
Y-
YA-MA-DA-SAN...
HA! JUST KIDDING! IT DOESN'T HURT!
NOW, TODDLE ALONG, KIDS!

I'VE ...
...GOT NOTHING LEFT OUTSIDE THIS MANSION.
A GUY LIKE HIM WON'T DIE EASILY!
YOU'VE GOT... ... SOMEONE WAITING AT HOME TO SEE YOU!
CAN'T LEAVE YOUR FRIEND ALONE, RIGHT?

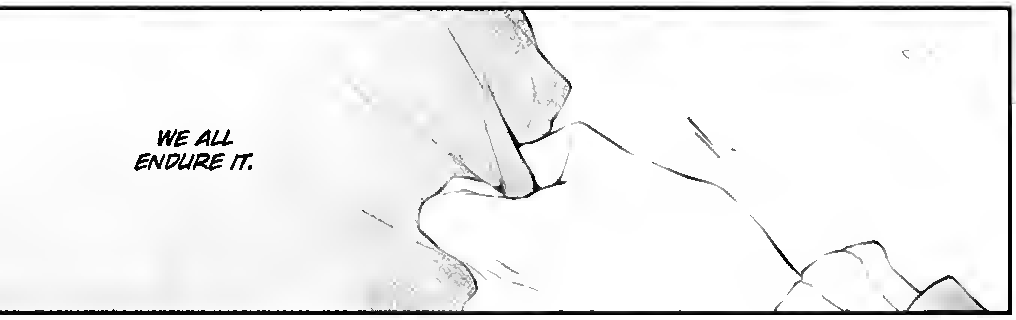
... THIS HAS BEEN MY HOME. AND YOU'RE ALL MY FAMILY.
EVER SINCE CAPTAIN SAGARA FOUND ME...

...WHAT I HOLD DEAR.
NOW, LET ME PROTECT ...

HEY... WAIT!
YAMADA-SAN!

KA-CLOP
CRASH
THUD
WELL, MARU?
WAS THAT ...
...A GRAND FINALE OR WHAT?

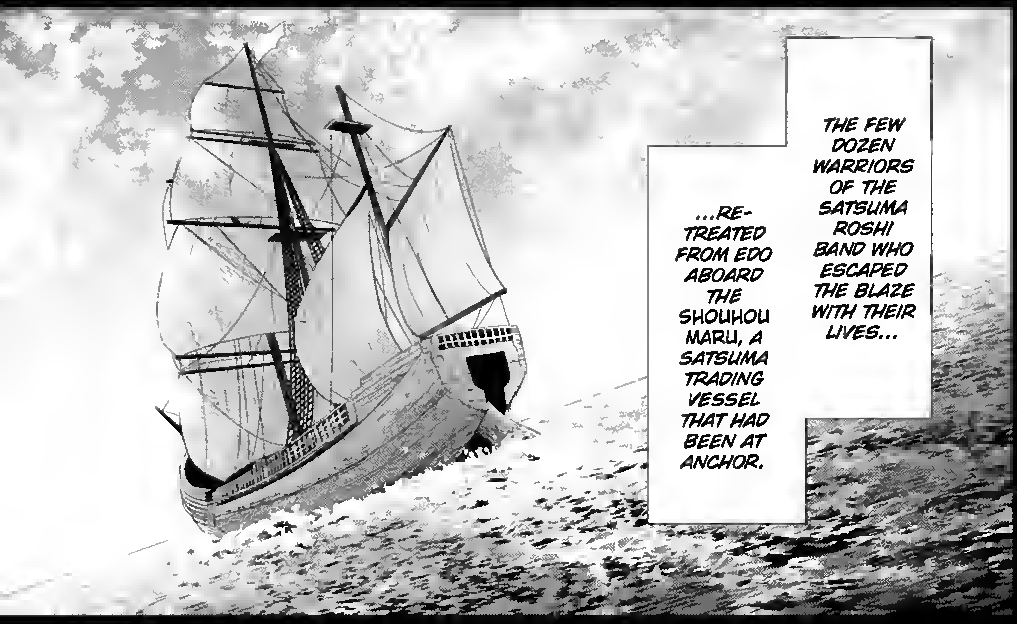
WELL...
IT WASN'T BAD... FOR YOU.
KABOOM
YA-MA-DA-SAN...

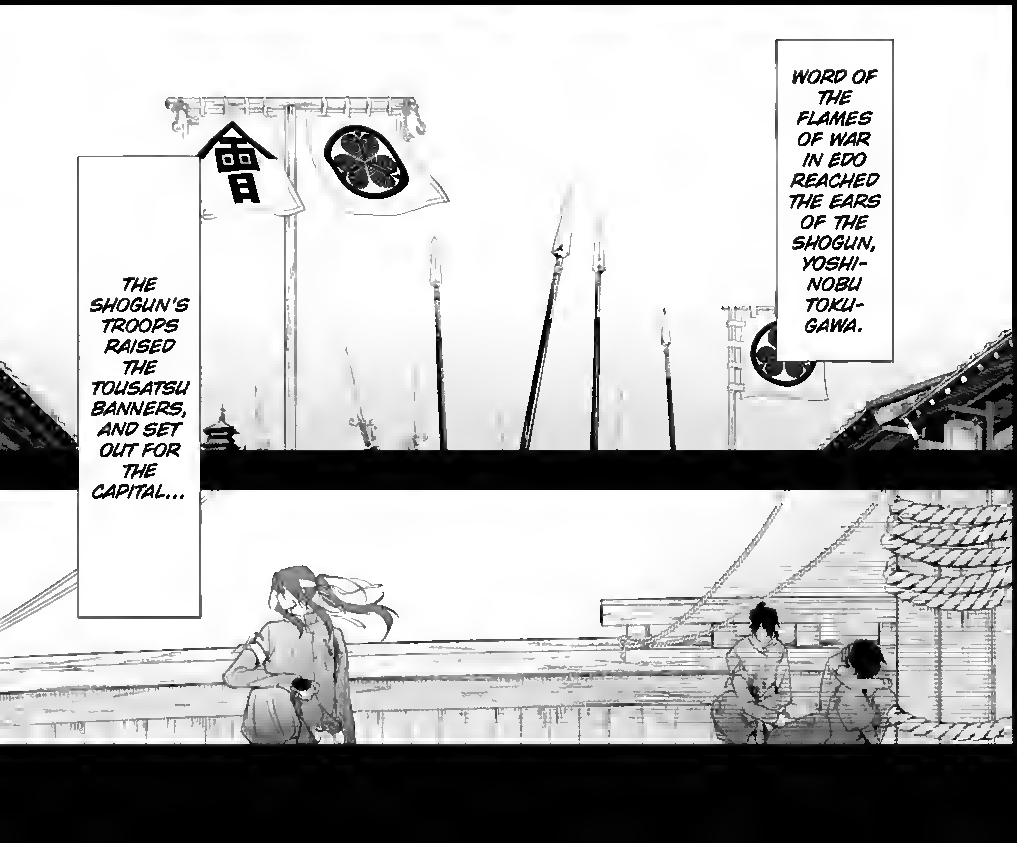

WE ALL ENDURE IT.

...SO MANY THINGS...
...AND YOU FEEL...
...THEY STRUGGLE INSIDE YOUR HEART...
THE PAIN AND THE RAGE...

YOU CARRY IT ALL, AND YOU LIVE ON.

THE SATSUMA MANSION IN EDO BURNED TO THE GROUND
DECEMBER 25, KEIOU 3


THE FEW DOZEN WARRIORS OF THE SATSUMA ROSHI BAND WHO ESCAPED THE BLAZE WITH THEIR LIVES...
...RE-TREATED FROM EDO ABOARD THE SHOUHOU MARU, A SATSUMA TRADING VESSEL THAT HAD BEEN AT ANCHOR.


WORD OF THE FLAMES OF WAR IN EDO REACHED THE EARS OF THE SHOGUN, YOSHI-NOBU TOKU-GAWA.
THE SHOGUN'S TROOPS RAISED THE TOUSATSU BANNERS, AND SET OUT FOR THE CAPITAL...

JANUARY 3, KEIOU 4

IN TOBA AND FUSHIMI, THE CURTAIN ROSE WITH A SHARP TUG...

...AND THE LAST OF THE JAPANESE CIVIL WARS, THE BOSHIN WAR, BEGAN TO PLAY OUT.

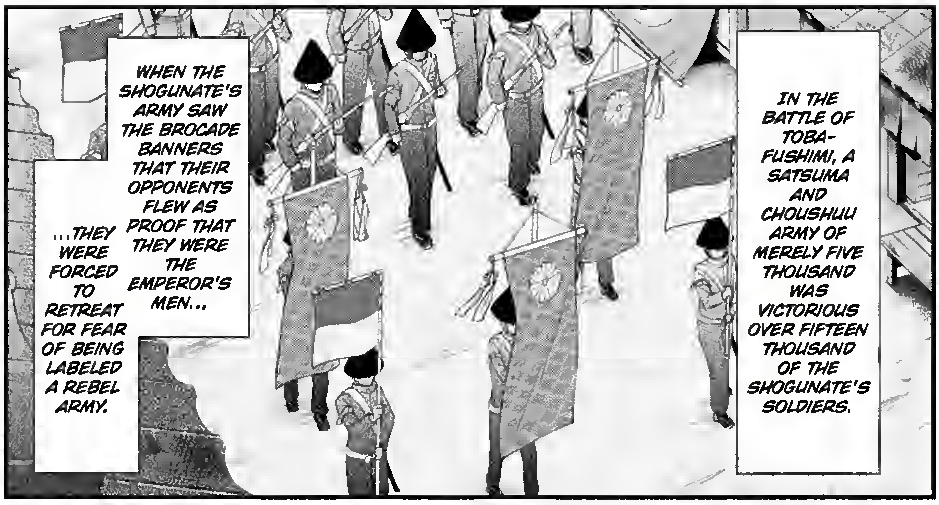
Chapter 22
JANUARY 3, KEIOU 4
FUSHIMI, KYOTO
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAAAM
ARE YOU HURT?
NO...BUT WE CAN'T WIN THIS BATTLE!
OUR GUNS DON'T COME CLOSE TO THE SATSUMA AND CHOUSHU ARMIES' BRAND-NEW REPEATING RIFLES!
AND THEIR MEN ARE OVER-WHELM-INGLY GOOD IN A FIRE-FIGHT ...!
IT'S TRUE ...
THE AGE OF THE SWORD IS OVER, ISN'T IT?
GUNS TAKE LIFE WITHOUT SENTIMENT OR ANY SENSE OF THE GRAVITY OF DEATH.
ALL THEY LEAVE YOU WITH IS THE SMELL OF SMOKE IN YOUR NOSTRILS ...
IT STINKS.
ISN'T IT, SAGARA!?
WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY DOING?
STARTING A WAR WITH THE SATSUMA LIKE IT'S NOTHING ...
THIS IS THE KIND OF FIGHTING YOU WERE TRYING TO AVOID!

WHOAAA...
WHAT ARE THEY ... ... RAISING SUCH A DAMN FUSS FOR?
H... HIJI-KATA-SAN...
THAT BANNER, IT'S...
!!?
FLAP
FLAP
THE IMPERIAL BROCADE BANNER ...!?

Chapter 22:
Harbingers of an Era

JANUARY 5, KEIOU 4
SATSUMA HEADQUARTERS, KYOTO

LORD SAGARA!
THESE BATTLES HAVE BEEN RESOUNDING VICTORIES FOR OUR ARMIES!
YOU DID WELL TO STRIKE THE SPARK THAT LIT THIS FIRE!
I'M MUCH OB-LIGED ...
...FOR YOUR THANKS


IN THE BATTLE OF TOBA-FUSHIMI, A SATSUMA AND CHOUSHUU ARMY OF MERELY FIVE THOUSAND WAS VICTORIOUS OVER FIFTEEN THOUSAND OF THE SHOGUNATE'S SOLDIERS.
WHEN THE SHOGUNATE'S ARMY SAW THE BROCADE BANNERS THAT THEIR OPPONENTS FLEW AS PROOF THAT THEY WERE THE EMPEROR'S MEN...
...THEY WERE FORCED TO RETREAT FOR FEAR OF BEING LABELED A REBEL ARMY.

OUR VICTORY AT TOBA-FUSHIMI WAS A FLYING LEAP TOWARD OVER-THROWING THE SHOGUN-ATE!
IT'S ALL THANKS TO LORD SAGARA AND HIS MEN, WHO STARTED THIS WAR WITH THEIR ACTIONS IN THE EDO RIOTS!
WE CANNOT THANK THEM ENOUGH!
.....
IS THIS REALLY WHAT YOU WANTED ...?

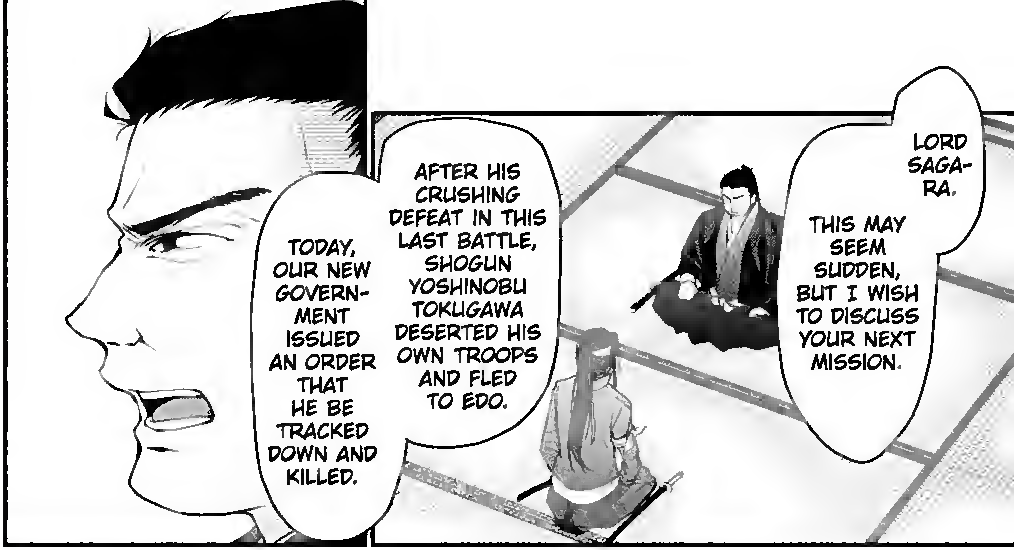
LORD MASUMITSU...
SA-GARA-SAN.
PLEASE TAKE YOUR MEN AND FLEE EDO ON YOUR OWN.
I HAVE NO WISH FOR YOU TO DIE!

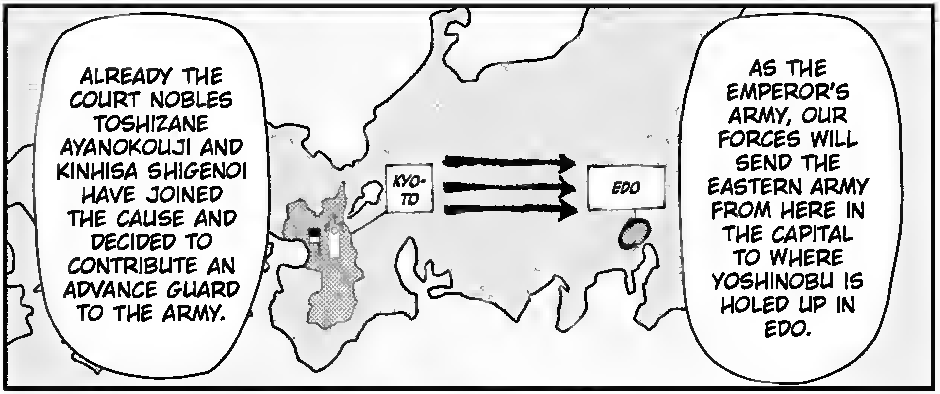
WHAT ...?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, LORD MASUMITSU ...!?
I WANT YOU TO SET OUT FOR THE CAPITAL AND SEEK AN AUDIENCE WITH LORD SAIGOU.
AND TELL HIM THIS FROM ME.
"THE RINGLEADER OF THESE ACTIONS WAS SOUZOU SAGARA."
...!?
SAGARA-SAN...
YOU MUST NOT PART COMPANY WITH THE SATSUMA YET.
IF WAR BREAKS OUT NOW, THE SATSUMA WILL WIN.
WE SHALL BE ONE STEP CLOSER TO FOUNDING A NEW GOVERNMENT.
BUT THAT WORLD WILL HAVE BEEN CREATED THROUGH BRUTE FORCE.
THAT IS WHY I BEG YOU TO BEAR THIS PATIENTLY FOR NOW AND GUIDE THEM!

OUR PEOPLE AND THE COMING NEW AGE...
YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN TAKE COMMAND OF THEM!
STOMP
STOP RIGHT THERE!
GRAB
THIS GUNFIRE MUST BE STOPPED!
SO YOU'RE THE RING-LEADER, EH!?
KER-CHAK
BLAM
!!!

I AM KYUUNO-SUKE MASUMITSU, COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE SATSUMA FACTION!
YOU'D BEST RETREAT NOW, YOU DOGS OF THE SHOGUNATE!
SHUT YOUR MOUTH!
THAT MAN IS...
...ONLY TRYING TO GET IN OUR WAY!
SEIZE THE BASTARD!
SO YOU'RE THE MAIN CULPRIT!
WE CAN'T STAY HERE!
LET'S PULL BACK FOR NOW!
SA-GARA-SAN!
WHAP

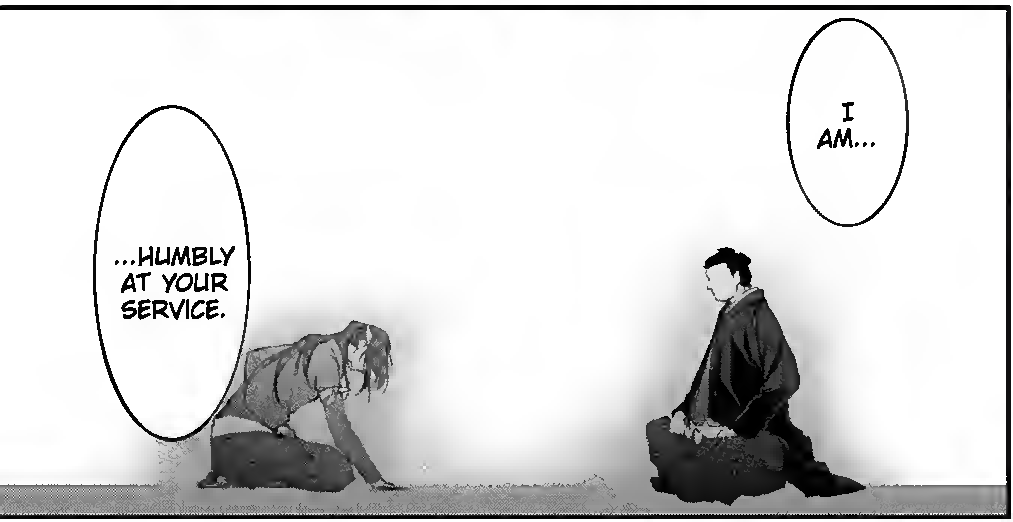
I CAN'T LET HIS DREAMS COME TO NOTHING.
LORD MASUMITSU LET HIMSELF BE ARRESTED TO HELP ME ESCAPE...
JANUARY 7
...AM I REALLY THE "ONLY ONE" WHO CAN TAKE COMMAND?
BUT...

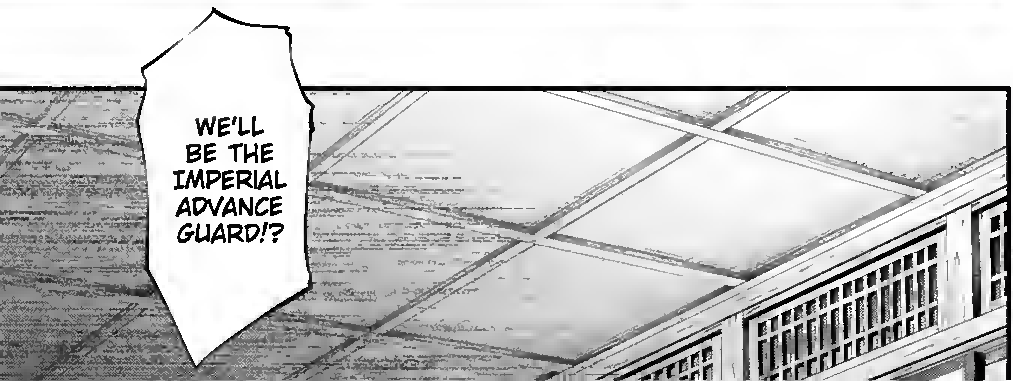

LORD SAGARA.
THIS MAY SEEM SUDDEN, BUT I WISH TO DISCUSS YOUR NEXT MISSION.
AFTER HIS CRUSHING DEFEAT IN THIS LAST BATTLE, SHOGUN YOSHINOBU TOKUGAWA DESERTED HIS OWN TROOPS AND FLED TO EDO.
TODAY, OUR NEW GOVERNMENT ISSUED AN ORDER THAT HE BE TRACKED DOWN AND KILLED.


ALREADY THE COURT NOBLES TOSHIZANE AYANOKOUJI AND KINHISA SHIGENOI HAVE JOINED THE CAUSE AND DECIDED TO CONTRIBUTE AN ADVANCE GUARD TO THE ARMY.
KYO-TO
EDO
AS THE EMPEROR'S ARMY, OUR FORCES WILL SEND THE EASTERN ARMY FROM HERE IN THE CAPITAL TO WHERE YOSHINOBU IS HOLED UP IN EDO.

!!!
I WOULD LIKE YOU AT THE HELM OF THAT ADVANCE GUARD, LORD SAGARA.

THE IMPE-RIAL ...
...AD-VANCE GUARD ?
I SEE...
LORD MASUMITSU KNEW OF THIS!
WHICH MEANS, I...
SHFF


I AM...
...HUMBLY AT YOUR SERVICE.

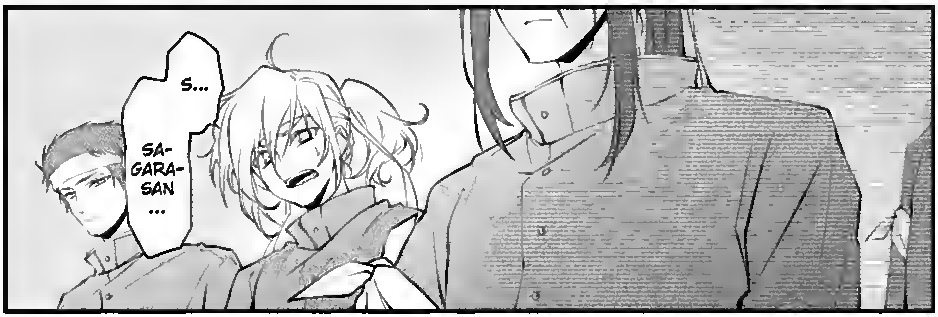

WE'LL BE THE IMPERIAL ADVANCE GUARD!?

AS THE ADVANCE GUARD, WOULDN'T WE BE ON THE FRONT LINES OF BATTLE!?
MURMUR
MURMUR
SO THIS WAR IS SPREADING ALL THE WAY EAST TO EDO?
ISN'T THAT... THE OPPOSITE OF THE WORLD THAT THE CAPTAIN ALWAYS DREAMED OF BUILDING ...?
MURMUR

IT IS AS THE YOUNG WARRIORS SAY, CAPTAIN SAGARA.

THIS WAR MUST BE EXACTLY WHAT YOU FEARED.
TO THINK WE'RE BEING SENT TO ITS FRONT LINES TO CLEAR A PATH OF WAR...
DON'T THEY KNOW WE'VE CUT TIES WITH THE SATSUMA!?
LORD MASUMITSU AND LORD IMUTA STRONGLY URGED THIS.
THEY WISHED OUR RELATIONS WITH THE SATSUMA TO REMAIN UNDISTURBED.

SO WE'VE STOOPED TO OVERTHROWING THE SHOGUNATE BY FORCE!?
IF THOSE TWO HADN'T RUN OFF TO DO AS THEY PLEASED, THIS WAR WOULDN'T BE...
WHAM
DO YOU REALLY HAVE SO LITTLE FAITH IN SAGARA-SAN!?
YOU THINK HE'S BEEN LEADING US THOUGHTLESSLY ALL THIS TIME—
SHIBUYA.


S...
SAGARA-SAN ...

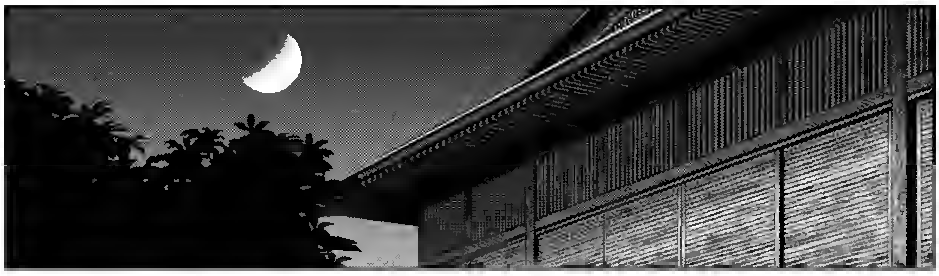
I...
...DO NOT INTEND TO STOP HERE.
BUT I WILL NOT FORCE THIS ON YOU ALL.
TOMORROW NIGHT, WE WILL LEAVE THIS TEMPLE AND JOIN THE ARMIES OF LORDS AYANOKOUJI AND SHIGENOI, WHO ARE WAITING IN OUMI PROVINCE.
IF ANY OF YOU WISH TO REMAIN BEHIND, YOU MAY GO, HERE AND NOW.

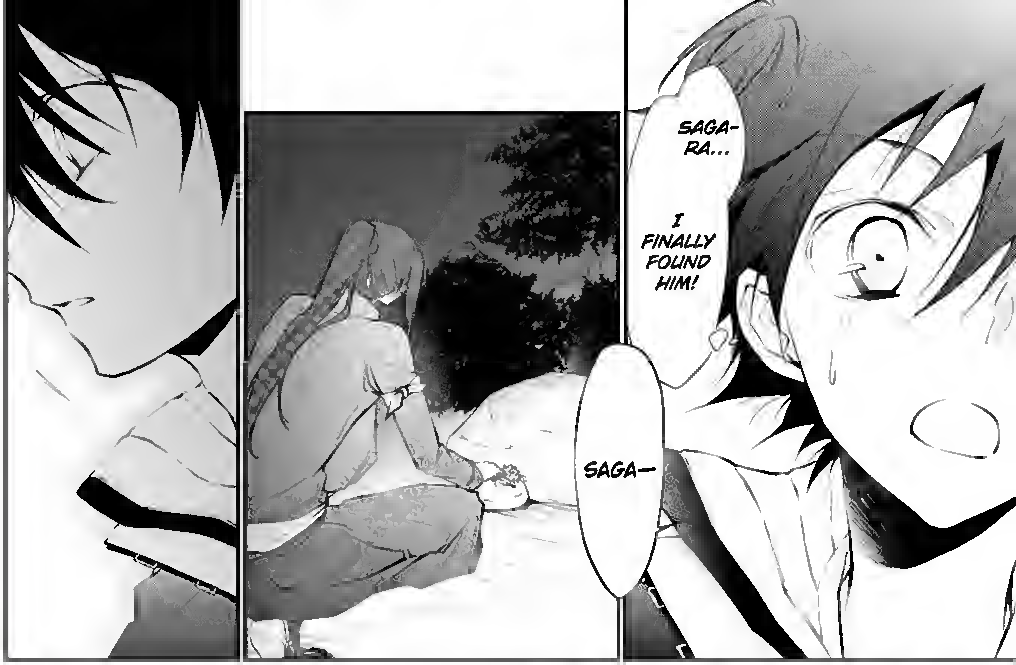
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO BELIEVE ANYMORE!
WHY SHOULD WE FIGHT ALONGSIDE MEN WHO SUPPORTED THE SHOGUN!?
YOU KNOW, THEY SAY THAT ARMY OF AYANO-KOUJI'S HAS FORMER SHINSEN-GUMI, TOMB GUARDS, AND SHRINE GUARDS IN IT...
MUTTER
MUTTER
WHAT ...? WHAT'S THAT SUP-POSED TO MEAN?

IT SEEMS THIS IS AS FAR AS WE GO.
STAND

HEY ...
YOU GUYS!
...
HEY, SAGA ...
... RA ...

STOMP
STOMP
MUTTER
RUSTLE
STAND
MUTTER



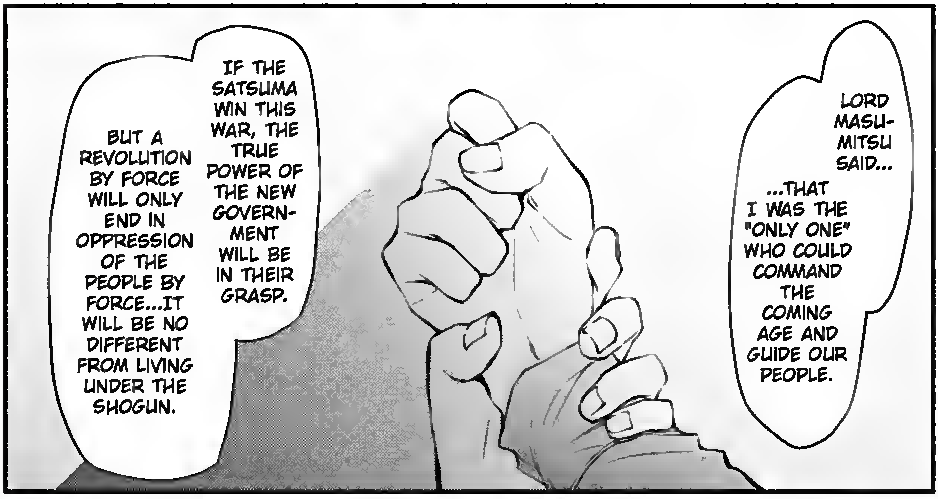

SAGA-RA...
I FINALLY FOUND HIM!
SAGA—

I'M SO SORRY.

NAITOU.
YAMA-DA.
MARU-HASHI.
EVERY-ONE...
I'M SO SORRY ...

SAGARA!
PUNCH
K...
KO-TETSU, IS THAT YOU?
FLING
WAIT.
I...I'VE GOT A COLD, SO MY EYES ARE RUNNING ...
SURE.
YOUR NOSE IS RUN-NING TOO...
...YOU KNOW.
SNIFF
NEVER MIND MY NOSE.
THAT'S JUST WHAT NOSES DO...

SAGA-RA...
WHEN I HEARD EVERYBODY TALKING LIKE THAT...I UNDERSTOOD HOW IT FELT TO NOT WANT TO MAKE MORE SACRIFICES, BUT ALSO TO NOT WANT THE SACRIFICES WE'VE ALREADY MADE TO BE FOR NOTHING.
BUT... YOUR EXPLANA-TION JUST NOW... THERE WAS A LOT...
...I DIDN'T GET.
WHAT ARE WE...
...GOING TO BE DOING FOR THE SATSUMA, EXACTLY?


LORD MASU-MITSU SAID...
...THAT I WAS THE "ONLY ONE" WHO COULD COMMAND THE COMING AGE AND GUIDE OUR PEOPLE.
IF THE SATSUMA WIN THIS WAR, THE TRUE POWER OF THE NEW GOVERN-MENT WILL BE IN THEIR GRASP.
BUT A REVOLUTION BY FORCE WILL ONLY END IN OPPRESSION OF THE PEOPLE BY FORCE...IT WILL BE NO DIFFERENT FROM LIVING UNDER THE SHOGUN.

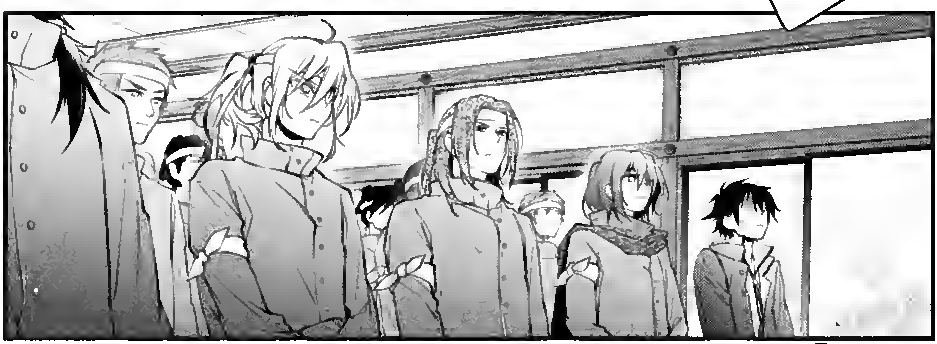
WHAT I CAN DO...
WHAT I DREAM OF LEADING ...
...IS THE CREATION OF A NEW AGE, WITH THE HELP OF THE WEAK AND THE COMMON.

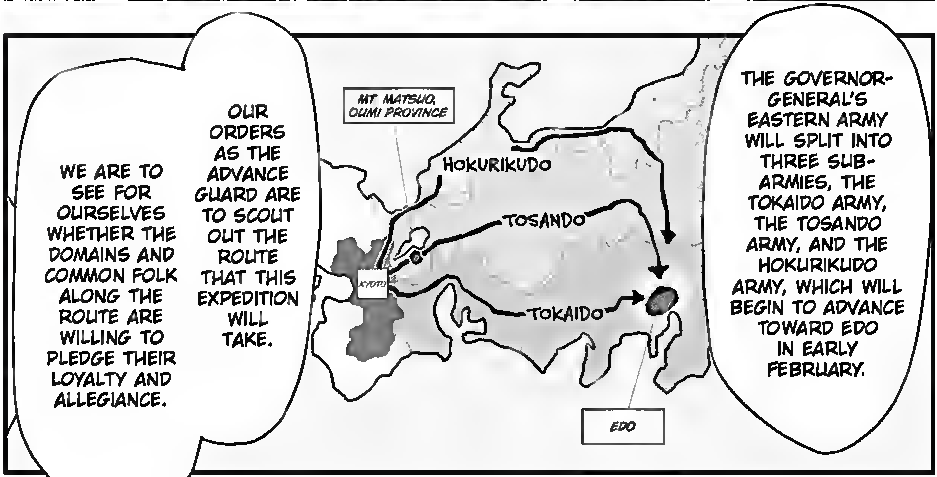
INDEED.
...OF THE WEAK?
WITH THE HELP ...

I WANT TO MOVE THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE.

JANUARY 10, KEIOU 4
KONGOURIN TEMPLE, MT. MATSUO, OUMI PROVINCE

WE WILL BE THE ADVANCE GUARD OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S EASTERN ARMY, FORMED TO PACIFY THE TOSANDO UNDER THE COMMAND OF THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL!



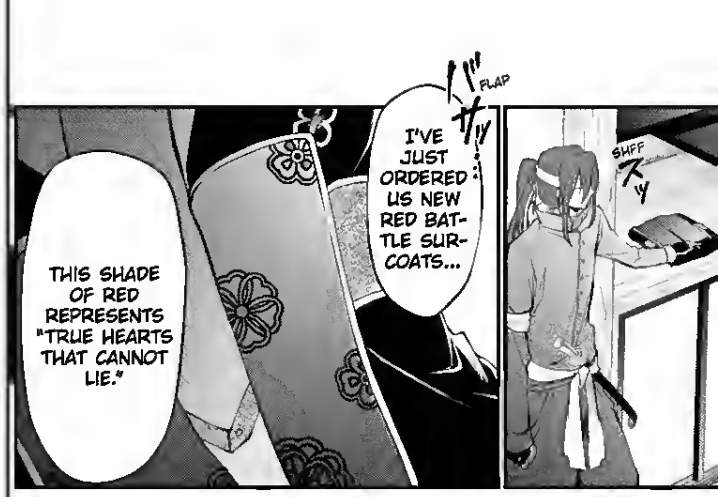

OUR ORDERS AS THE ADVANCE GUARD ARE TO SCOUT OUT THE ROUTE THAT THIS EXPEDITION WILL TAKE.
WE ARE TO SEE FOR OURSELVES WHETHER THE DOMAINS AND COMMON FOLK ALONG THE ROUTE ARE WILLING TO PLEDGE THEIR LOYALTY AND ALLEGIANCE.
MT. MATSUO, OUMI PROVINCE
HOKURIKUDO
TOSANDO
KYOTO
TOKAIDO
EDO
THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S EASTERN ARMY WILL SPLIT INTO THREE SUB-ARMIES, THE TOKAIDO ARMY, THE TOSANDO ARMY, AND THE HOKURIKUDO ARMY, WHICH WILL BEGIN TO ADVANCE TOWARD EDO IN EARLY FEBRUARY.

BUT, THEN... HOW WILL WE "MOVE THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE"?
AND SINCE WE, THE ADVANCE GUARD, WILL PRECEDE THE ONCOMING ARMY...
"SCOUT OUT THE ROUTE THEY'LL TAKE"... THAT MEANS...A PRELIMINARY INSPECTION?
I KINDA IMAGINE IT LIKE THIS, BUT MAYBE THAT'S WRONG ...?
MENTAL IMAGE
BANG BANG
BLAM
HYAH!
NEIGH!
HAH...
THE ADVANCE GUARD IN BATTLE IS ON THE VERY FRONT LINES, SO...
...WE WILL PRESENT A PETITION TO THE GRAND COUNCIL OF STATE OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT.
A PETITION ...!?
FOR WHAT PURPOSE ...?
MURMUR
あ！...

AN ADVANCE GUARD CAN INFLUENCE THE PATH TAKEN BY WAR...
ON THE OTHER HAND, WE CAN ALSO SUGGEST A PATH THAT DOES NOT REQUIRE US TO BRANDISH OUR ARMED MIGHT.
IF WE CHOOSE NOT TO TAKE UP OUR SWORDS BUT TO SEIZE THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE ...
...THIS WILL NOT BE A COUP BY FORCE.
WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLE, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO BUILD A NEW AGE AND CHANGE THE WORLD.
WE INTEND TO SUGGEST A POLICY...
...OF REDUCING THE LAND TAX BY HALF!
WE WILL PETITION THE GREAT COUNCIL OF STATE TO ENFORCE THIS POLICY AND WIN THE SUPPORT OF THE MASSES!

IF...
IF THE NEW GOVERNMENT CAN REALLY PROMISE THAT...
YEAH ...
THE PEOPLE WHO'VE SUFFERED UNDER THE HEAVY TAXES WILL BE SURE TO FOLLOW US!
ザわ？！
CLAMOR
RE-DUCE THE LAND TAX BY HALF ...!?
PLEASE, SEND THE PETI-TION!
THE ORDER TO CUT TAXES CAN BE THE BRIGHT TORCH WE CARRY AS THE ADVANCE GUARD!
SO THIS IS WHAT SAGARA WAS THINKING ABOUT!
SAGA-RA-SAN!
IF WE'RE GONNA START SOMETHING THIS BIG, WE CAN'T JUST BE CALLED "THE ADVANCE GUARD"!
PLEASE, GIVE US A NEW NAME!
HMM ...

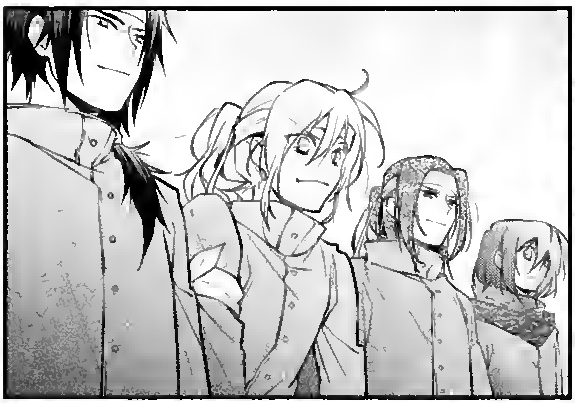
...THE "SEKIHOU-TAI"!


FLAP
I'VE JUST ORDERED US NEW RED BATTLE SURCOATS...
THIS SHADE OF RED REPRESENTS "TRUE HEARTS THAT CANNOT LIE."
SHFF

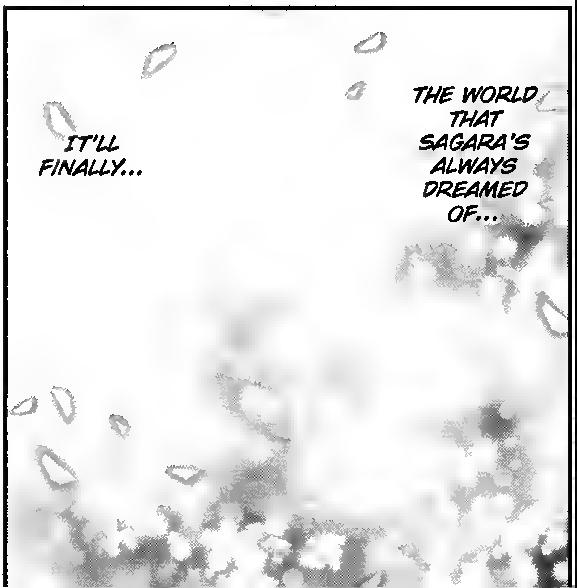
A BRILLIANT RED HEART THAT CANNOT TELL A LIE...
IN OTHER WORDS, A "SCARLET HEART."
SINCE WE POSSESS SCARLET HEARTS TO SERVE OUR COUNTRY ...
...I HEREBY DUB US...

FLAP
I'VE JUST ORDERED US NEW RED BATTLE SURCOATS...
THIS SHADE OF RED REPRESENTS "TRUE HEARTS THAT CANNOT LIE."
SHPP
A BRILLIANT RED HEART THAT CANNOT TELL A LIE...
IN OTHER WORDS, A "SCARLET HEART."
SINCE WE POSSESS SCARLET HEARTS TO SERVE OUR COUNTRY ...
...I HEREBY DUB US...

...THE "SEKIHOU-TAI"!



WE'RE REALLY GOING TO MARCH OUT THERE AND CHANGE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD!
AMAZING...


IT'LL FINALLY...
THE WORLD THAT SAGARA'S ALWAYS DREAMED OF...

THE SEKIHOU-TAI!

JANUARY 12, KEIOU 4

SAGARA SENT THE PETITION ADVOCATING FOR A REDUCTION IN LAND TAXES TO KYOTO TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT, AND THE IMPERIAL COURT ISSUED THE ORDER FOR REDUCTION OF TAXES.

THE SEKIHOUTAI BEGAN THEIR MARCH AS THE OFFICIAL ADVANCE GUARD OF THE IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT, USING THE ORDER FOR TAX REDUCTIONS AS THEIR RALLYING CRY.

THANK YOU FOR LOOKING AFTER ME...

...MIZUHARA.

YOU'RE QUITE ...

...A DIFFICULT FELLOW TO LOOK AFTER.

I SUPPOSE I AM.

DO TRY...

...AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

THE VICE-CAPTAIN OF THE ROSHI BAND, JIROU MIZUHARA, WAS REASSIGNED TO WORK UNDER THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL ALONG WITH THEIR CHIEF INSPECTOR, KARITA.

HE CHANGED HIS NAME TO NAOKI AND PARTED WAYS WITH SAGARA AND THE BAND IN KYOTO.

TRMP
LET'S GO.
WE ARE THE HARBINGERS OF AN ERA.

<VANGUARD>

FIRST UNIT:
COMPOSED OF WARRIORS FROM THE SATSUMA ROSHI BAND IN EDO
(CAPTAIN: SOUZOU SAGARA)

<ATTACHED SQUAD>

SECOND UNIT:
TOMB GUARDS, SHRINE GUARDS, AND OTHERS
(CAPTAIN: MIKISABUROU SUZUKI)

<REAR GUARD>

THIRD UNIT:
WARRIORS FROM MINAKUCHI, OUMI PROVINCE, AND OTHERS
(CAPTAIN: RENZABUROU ABURAKAWA)

(UNDER SUPERVISION OF LORD TOSHIZANE AYANOKOUJI)

<DETACHED FORCE>

SHIGENOI'S ARMY:
DERIVED FROM THE THIRD UNIT

(UNDER SUPERVISION OF LORD KINHISA SHIGENOI)

FOR THEIR MARCH, THE SEKIHOUTAI IS ORGANIZED INTO THREE SUCCESSIVE PLATOONS.

AT THIS TIME, THEIR FORCES ARE NUMBERED AT THREE HUNDRED STRONG.

JANUARY 15, KEIOU 4, THE SEKIHOUTAI BEGINS THEIR MARCH.

LED BY SAGARA, THE FIRST UNIT MOVES NORTH ALONG THE TOSANDO.

...AND WAS QUICKLY SUCCESSFUL IN RAISING AWARENESS AND HOPE AMONG THE COMMON FOLK SUFFERING IN TERRIBLE POVERTY.

THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S ORDER TO REDUCE TAXES WAS SPREAD BY THE SEKIHOUTAI ...

SIGN: TAXES WILL BE CUT BY HALF

年貢半

...AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE SEKIHOUTAI ONLY CONTINUED TO GROW.

OFFERS OF WAR FUNDS, MEN, AND HORSES CAME FROM THE DOMAINS THAT SWORE LOYALTY ALONG THE ROUTE...

MANY YOUNG FOLK AMONG THEM SUPPORTED THE SEKIHOUTAI AND WELCOMED THEIR ONWARD MARCH.

SIGN. TAXES WILL BE CUT BY HALF
TRMP
TRMP
TO THE COMMON FOLK, THE SEKI-HOUTAI...
...CAME TO EMBODY THEIR HOPES FOR THE NEW AGE.

TO THE COMMON FOLK, THE SEKI-HOUTAI...
...CAME TO EMBODY THEIR HOPES FOR THE NEW AGE.

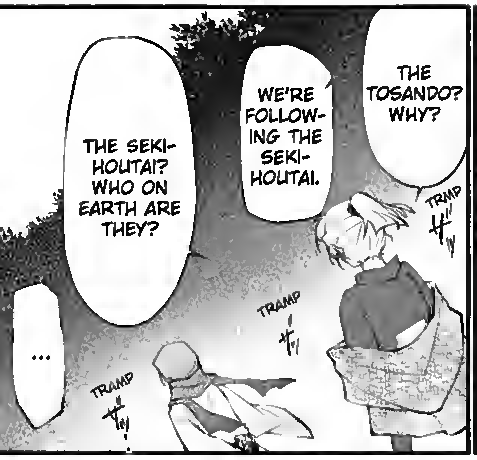
SIGN. TAXES WILL BE CUT BY HALF

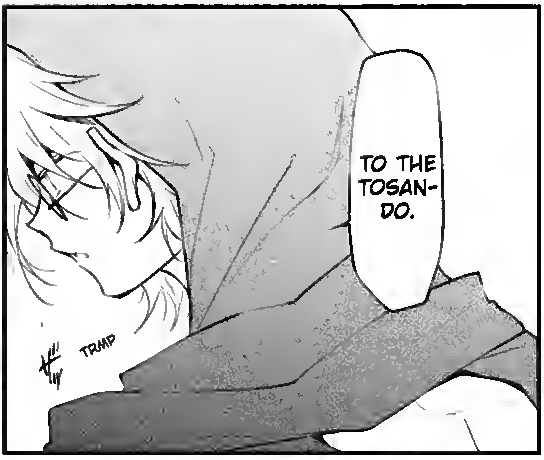
TRMP
TRMP

TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
TRMP
PLEASE WAIT!
HEY ...
HFF!
HAFF!
TAK
TAK
TAK
STOP
SHIKYOU!

AT LEAST TELL ME WHERE WE'RE GOING!

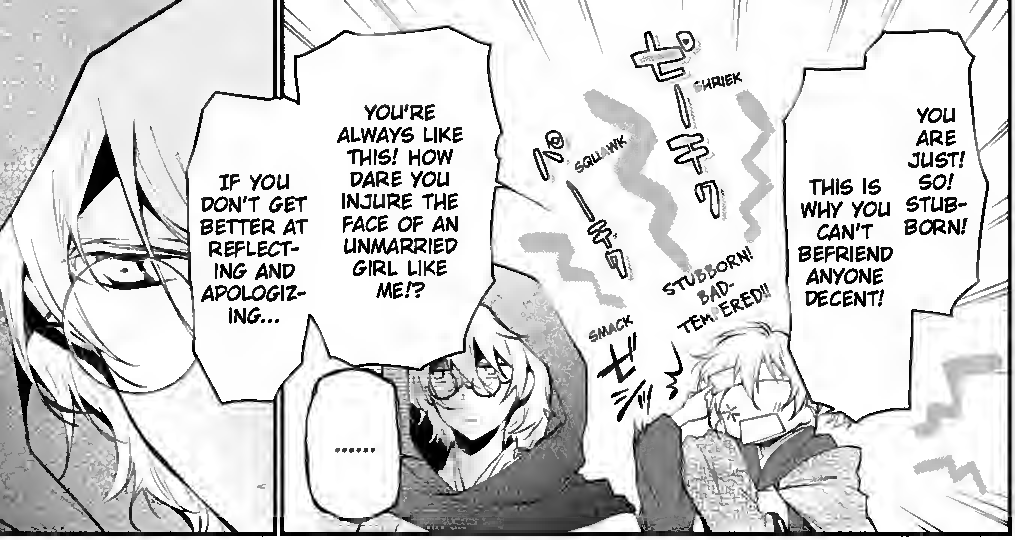
FOR PITY'S SAKE ...
EVER SINCE THIS MORNING, IT'S BEEN HURRY, HURRY, HURRY...
HFF!
HFF!


THE SEKI-HOUTAI? WHO ON EARTH ARE THEY?
WE'RE FOLLOW-ING THE SEKI-HOUTAI.
THE TOSANDO? WHY?
...
TRAMP
TRAMP
TRAMP


TO THE TOSAN-DO.
TRAMP

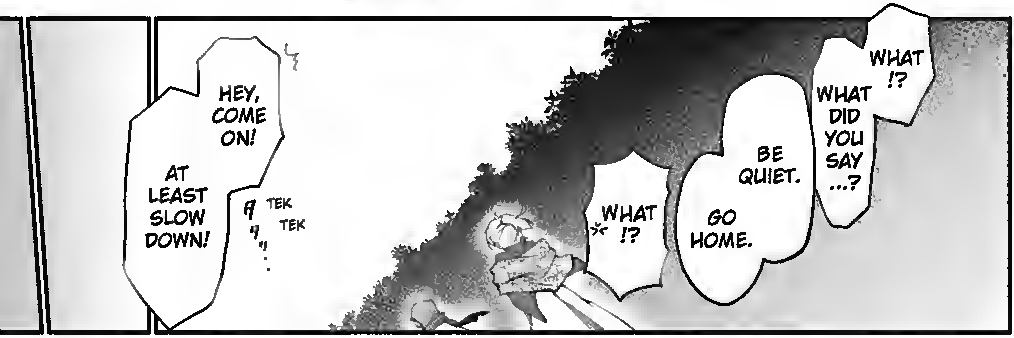
WHAT!?
YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL I EVEN ANSWER YOUR ENDLESS QUESTIONS.
HEY!
YOU ONLY SAY THAT BECAUSE YOU HARDLY SPEAK AT ALL!
YOU'RE A TERRIBLY NOISY WENCH...

SHIROU KOJIMA IS WITH THEM.
SHIROU... YOU MEAN SAGARA-HAN!?
THEN THE REST OF THE ROSHI BAND MUST BE—
AT ANY RATE, WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME?
WHAT?
TRUDGE
TRUDGE
TRUDGE
TEK
TEK
TEK
DIDN'T I TELL YOU? I'M GOING TO BE YOUR SHEATH.
I WON'T LET YOU KILL ANYONE ANYMORE!
PARTICU-LARLY IF YOU INSIST ON GOING AFTER SAGARA-HAN!
IF YOU DRAW YOUR SWORD, I'LL STOP YOU, EVEN IF I MUST THROW MYSE—
THEN I'LL KILL YOU AS WELL.
AWW... I DON'T BELIEVE THIS!
YOU'RE STILL ACTING SO HORRI-BLE...
DON'T YOU UNDER-STAND?
IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE, BE SILENT AND BEGONE.
TWITCH

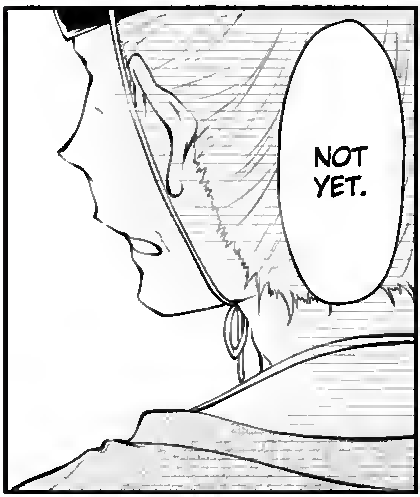

YOU'RE ALWAYS LIKE THIS! HOW DARE YOU INJURE THE FACE OF AN UNMARRIED GIRL LIKE ME!?
IF YOU DON'T GET BETTER AT REFLECTING AND APOLOGIZING...
.....
SHRIEK
SQUISHK
SMACK
STUBBORN! BADTEMPERED!!
YOU ARE JUST! SO! STUBBORN!
THIS IS WHY YOU CAN'T BEFRIEND ANYONE DECENT!

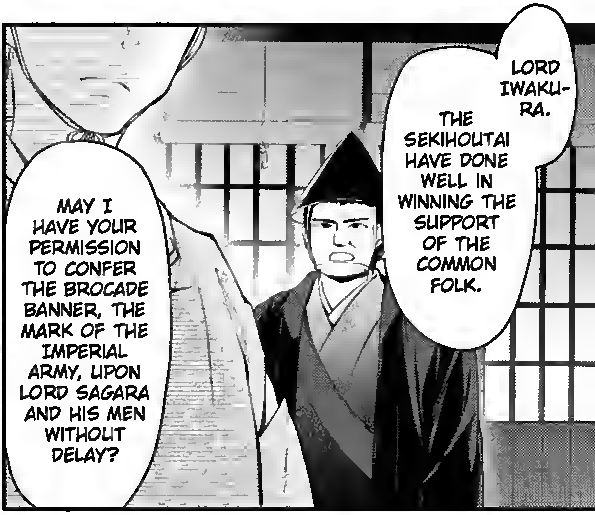
MUTTER
EVEN YOUR PRATTLING TONGUE IS JUST LIKE AYANO'S ...
....
HUH ...?

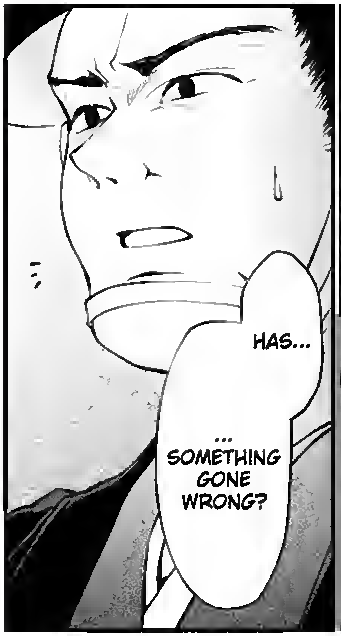
"I'LL TAKE CARE OF MOTHER, SO...YOU TAKE FATHER AND GET AWAY QUICK!"
"FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, NII-SAN! PUT BOOKS BACK ON THE SHELF WHEN YOU'VE READ THEM!"


HEY, COME ON!
AT LEAST SLOW DOWN!
TEK TEK
WHAT !?
BE QUIET.
GO HOME.
WHAT !?
WHAT DID YOU SAY ...?

JANUARY 21, KEIOU 4
KYOTO


NOT YET.


LORD IWAKURA.
THE SEKIHOUTAI HAVE DONE WELL IN WINNING THE SUPPORT OF THE COMMON FOLK.
MAY I HAVE YOUR PERMISSION TO CONFER THE BROCADE BANNER, THE MARK OF THE IMPERIAL ARMY, UPON LORD SAGARA AND HIS MEN WITHOUT DELAY?

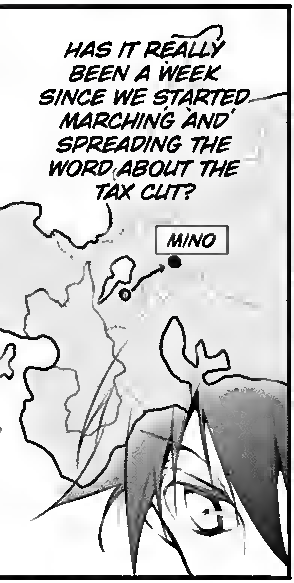

HAS...
... SOMETHING GONE WRONG?

NOT YET? BUT MY LORD...IF WE DON'T SEND THEM THE BANNER ...
...AT THIS RATE, THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL.....

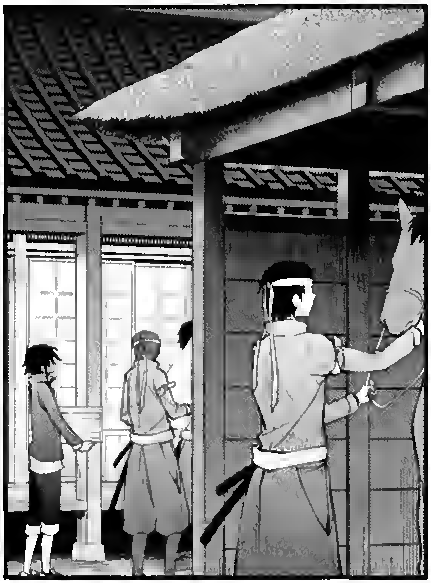
THE PACIFYING EASTERN ARMY, FOR WHICH SAGARA AND HIS MEN ARE THE ADVANCE GUARD, SET OUT FROM KYOTO A DAY OR TWO AGO.
TAP
TAP
TAP
HOWEVER... OUR WAR FUNDS WILL NOT SUFFICE TO SUPPORT THEM.
IT'S NOT MERELY THE WAR FUNDS... IT'S OUR CURRENT FISCAL WOES.
IF OUR NEW GOVERNMENT IS TO GET MOVING IN EARNEST, WE WILL NEED VAST SUMS OF MONEY...
SLAM
THIS ORDER TO REDUCE TAXES...
...HAS BECOME A MERE STUMBLING BLOCK.

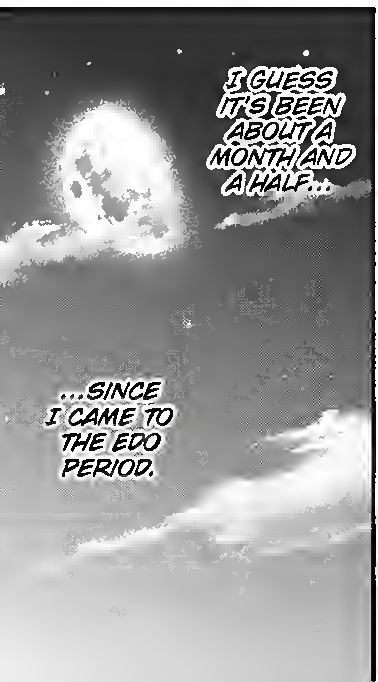
Scarlet
EMPIRE

JANUARY 22, KEIOU 4,
MINO PROVINCE
Chapter 23


HAS IT REALLY BEEN A WEEK SINCE WE STARTED MARCHING AND SPREADING THE WORD ABOUT THE TAX CUT?
MINO

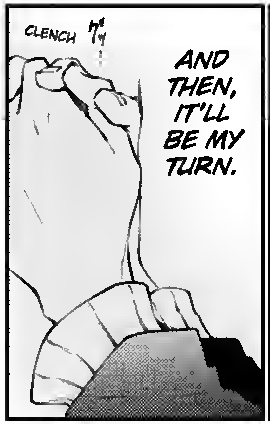
PHEW...
THUMP
ふぅ

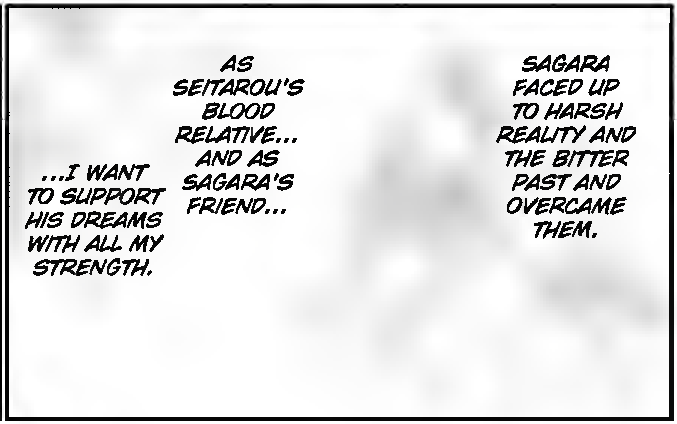



I GUESS IT'S BEEN ABOUT A MONTH AND A HALF...
...SINCE I CAME TO THE EDO PERIOD.

IT'S STILL A LONG WAY TO OUR DESTINATION IN EDO, BUT THE PEOPLE ALONG THE WAY CHEER US ON AND LOOK SO HAPPY WHEN THEY HEAR ABOUT THE TAX CUTS, IT REALLY FEELS LIKE THIS IS GONNA GO WITHOUT A HITCH...
GLEN

THE NEW AGE SAGARA DREAMED OF WILL COME TRUE ANY DAY NOW.

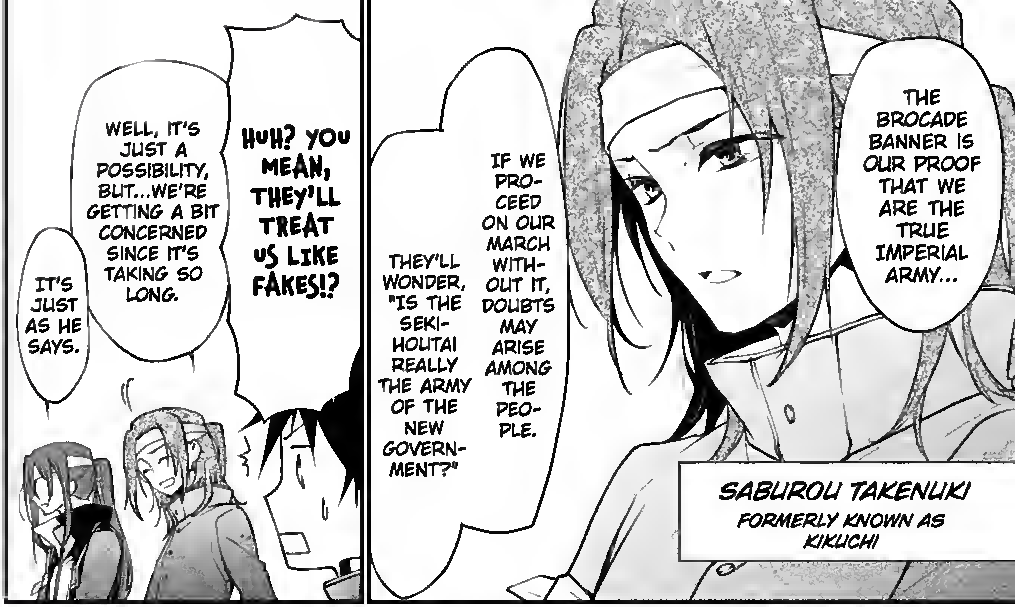

CLENCH
AND THEN, IT'LL BE MY TURN.


...I WANT TO SUPPORT HIS DREAMS WITH ALL MY STRENGTH.
AS SEITAROU'S BLOOD RELATIVE... AND AS SAGARA'S FRIEND...
SAGARA FACED UP TO HARSH REALITY AND THE BITTER PAST AND OVERCAME THEM.

NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT IT, IT'S TAKING TOO LONG!

BUT FOR THAT, I'LL NEED A WAY TO GET BACK TO...
TO FACE YAYOI...

INDEED.
AT THIS RATE, WE MUST TAKE ACTION SOON, OR WE'LL SET A POOR EXAMPLE FOR THE PEOPLE.
スー…
SLIDE
CAPTAIN SAGARA!
IF THEY'D DONE WHAT THEY SAID ORIGINALLY, THE BANNERS WOULD HAVE BEEN READY WITHIN THREE DAYS...
...?
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?
OOKI—
IT'S OOKI NOW!
HUH ...?
YOU USED MY OLD NAME, WITH "KI" AS IN "ARBOR." NOW IT'S "KI" AS IN "TREE"!
YOU DIDN'T PRONOUNCE THE "KI" RIGHT!
HOW CAN HE TELL ...?
S-SORRY, UH... "OOKI"... ANYWAY, WHAT WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
SHIROU OOKI
...FORMERLY KNOWN AS... SHIROU OOKI
WE HAVEN'T HEARD FROM THE NEW GOVERNMENT RECENTLY, NOT SINCE WE SUBMITTED THE PETITION FOR THE TAX CUT.
?
BUT THAT PETITION WAS ACCEPTED, WASN'T IT? IS THERE STILL A PROBLEM?
WE STILL HAVEN'T BEEN GRANTED THE BROCADE BANNER OR PERMISSION TO ADVANCE ALONG THE TOSANDO.

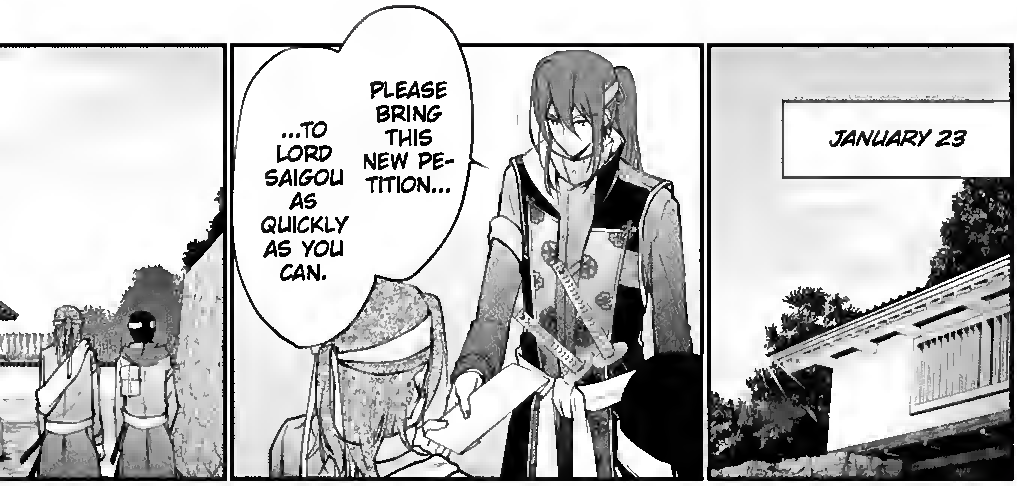

THE BROCADE BANNER IS OUR PROOF THAT WE ARE THE TRUE IMPERIAL ARMY...
IF WE PROCEED ON OUR MARCH WITHOUT IT, DOUBTS MAY ARISE AMONG THE PEOPLE.
THEY'LL WONDER, "IS THE SEKIHOUTAI REALLY THE ARMY OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT?"
SABUROU TAKENUKI
FORMERLY KNOWN AS KIKUCHI
HUH? YOU MEAN, THEY'LL TREAT US LIKE FAKES!?
WELL, IT'S JUST A POSSIBILITY, BUT...WE'RE GETTING A BIT CONCERNED SINCE IT'S TAKING SO LONG.
IT'S JUST AS HE SAYS.

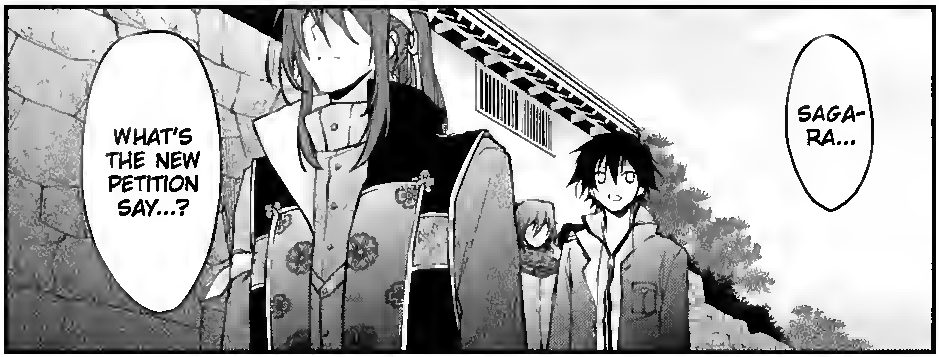
THAT IS WHY WE MUST BE GRANTED THE BANNER AS SOON AS CAN BE ARRANGED TO PUT THEIR DOUBTS TO REST.
HOWEVER, TEN DAYS HAVE PASSED SINCE WE WERE TOLD, "MARCH AHEAD, AND YOUR PROOF OF IMPERIAL AUTHORITY WILL BE SENT ALONG AFTER YOU"... NO FURTHER DIRECTIVES HAVE COME.

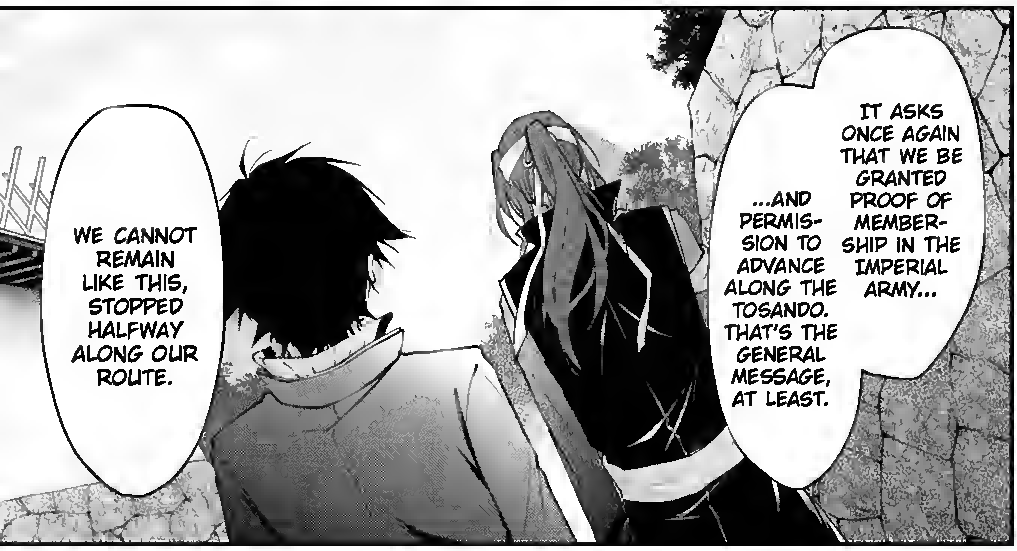
SFX: STOMP STOMP STOMP
B-BUT...
IT'LL BE OKAY... WON'T IT?
...
CAPTAIN SAGARA...!!
KOMATSU.
I-IT'S AWFUL, SIR...!

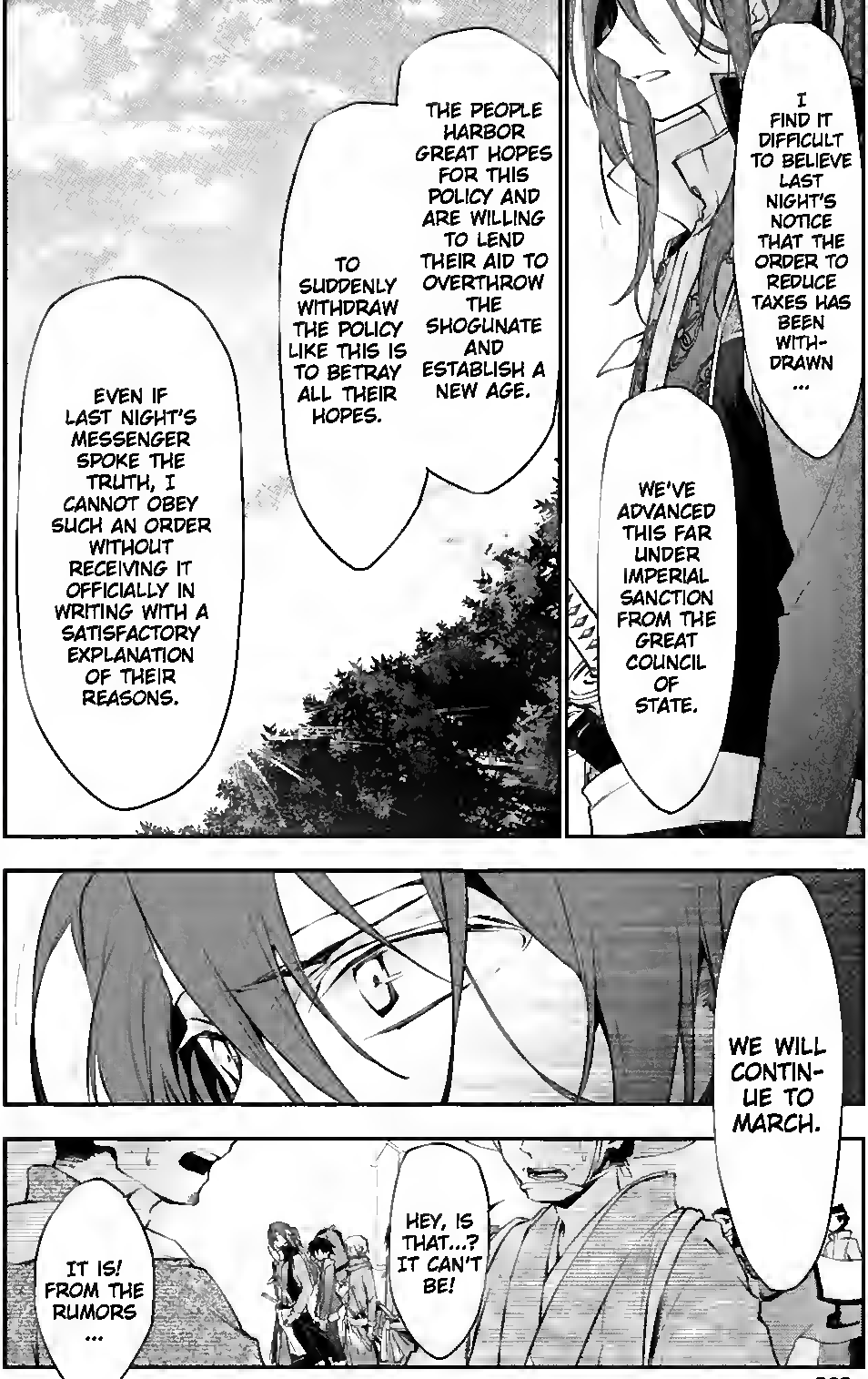
JUST A MOMENT AGO...
...A MESSENGER FROM THE NEW GOVERNMENT ARRIVED FROM KYOTO...
FROM KYOTO!?
THAT MUST MEAN WE'VE FINALLY RECEIVED OUR PROOF OF APPROVAL, RIGHT!?
H-HE SAYS WE MUST CONTINUE TO WAIT FOR THAT...
WHAT!?
WHAT'S MORE... IT'S VERY STRANGE.
HE BROUGHT NO OFFICIAL LETTER ONLY A SPOKEN MESSAGE.
"THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAS WITHDRAWN THE ORDER TO REDUCE TAXES."
"THE SEKIHOUTAI MUST TAKE DOWN THEIR SIGNBOARD PROCLAIMING THE TAX REDUCTION IMMEDIATELY."

Chapter 23: A Miraculous Encounter


PLEASE BRING THIS NEW PETITION...
...TO LORD SAIGOU AS QUICKLY AS YOU CAN.
JANUARY 23


SAGARA...
WHAT'S THE NEW PETITION SAY...?


IT ASKS ONCE AGAIN THAT WE BE GRANTED PROOF OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE IMPERIAL ARMY...
...AND PERMISSION TO ADVANCE ALONG THE TOSANDO. THAT'S THE GENERAL MESSAGE, AT LEAST.
WE CANNOT REMAIN LIKE THIS, STOPPED HALFWAY ALONG OUR ROUTE.


I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE LAST NIGHT'S NOTICE THAT THE ORDER TO REDUCE TAXES HAS BEEN WITH-DRAWN ...
WE'VE ADVANCED THIS FAR UNDER IMPERIAL SANCTION FROM THE GREAT COUNCIL OF STATE.
THE PEOPLE HARBOR GREAT HOPES FOR THIS POLICY AND ARE WILLING TO LEND THEIR AID TO OVERTHROW THE SHOGUNATE AND ESTABLISH A NEW AGE.
TO SUDDENLY WITHDRAW THE POLICY LIKE THIS IS TO BETRAY ALL THEIR HOPES.
EVEN IF LAST NIGHT'S MESSENGER SPOKE THE TRUTH, I CANNOT OBEY SUCH AN ORDER WITHOUT RECEIVING IT OFFICIALLY IN WRITING WITH A SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION OF THEIR REASONS.
WE WILL CONTIN-UE TO MARCH.
HEY, IS THAT...? IT CAN'T BE!
IT IS! FROM THE RUMORS ...

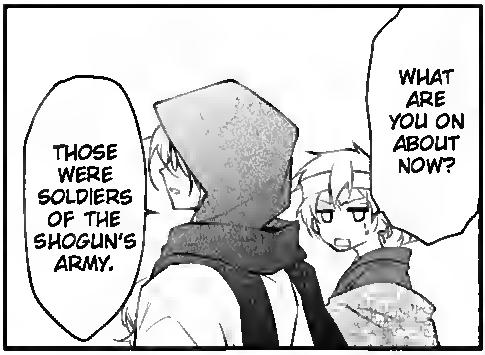
THE BAND OF ROBBERS WHO'VE BEEN ATTACKING RICH MEN'S HOMES! THE ONES CALLED THE SEKIHOUTA! ...!
EX-CUSE ME... WHAT DID YOU SAY?
OH! NO, I...
SHUFFLE
MURMUR
ARE THEY TRYING TO TRICK US TOO?
I KNEW CUTTING OUR TAXES SOUNDED TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!
MURMUR
IT REALLY IS THE SEKI-HOUTA!!
THEY'VE GOT A SIGN ABOUT THE TAX CUTS...
CLAMOR
WHAT ON EARTH ...
...IS GOING ON...!?
WE DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY TO GIVE TO A FAKE IMPERIAL ARMY LIKE YOURS!
GO HOME!

I'VE BEEN HEARING THESE RUMORS ABOUT US FOR THE PAST FEW DAYS, BUT...
IT SEEMS RUMORS ARE ALREADY CIRCULATING IN THE CAPITAL ABOUT THE APPEARANCE OF...
...A "ROBBER BAND" CALLED THE SEKIHOUTAI, WHO "CLAIM TO BE PART OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S ARMY."
YOU'VE GOTTA BE JOKING!
THAT'S TOTAL NONSENSE! WHY WOULD ANYONE—
CALM DOWN, SOUJI. WE MUSTN'T START QUARRELING NOW...
SLAM
BUT IT MAKES NO SENSE!!
WE NEVER DID ANYTHING WRONG, BUT...!
DAMMIT! IF WE JUST HAD THE BROCADE BANNER, THEY WOULDN'T DOUBT US LIKE THIS!
AT ANY RATE, WE CANNOT AFFORD TO MAKE A MISSTEP NOW...
TAKENUKI AND HIS MEN SHOULD RETURN TOMORROW FROM DELIVERING THE SECOND PETITION.
WE'LL AWAIT THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S REPLY.

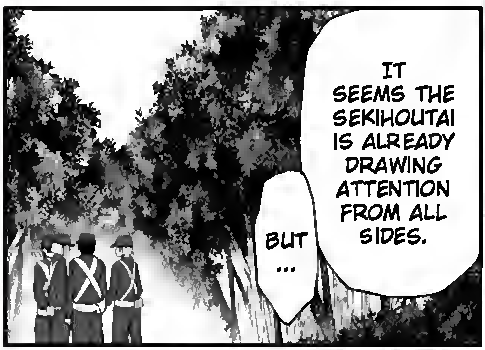
JANUARY 25
CAP-TAIN...
WHAT DOES THE MESSAGE FROM THE CAPITAL SAY?
"RETURN TO THE CAPITAL AT ONCE."
!!?
WHAT? BUT... WHY!?
IT SEEMS THE SECOND AND THIRD UNITS HAVE ALREADY CHANGED COURSE TO THE TOSANDO AND SET OUT FOR KUWANA.

EVEN AFTER GETTING OUR PETITION ON THE 23RD, THEY STILL HAVEN'T SENT PROOF THAT WE'RE PART OF THE ARMY! THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE ORDER TO REDUCE TAXES, THE RUMORS IN THE CAPITAL...
...AND ON TOP OF ALL THAT, THIS ORDER TO RETURN...
NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT IT, SOMETHING'S AMISS!
CAPTAIN SAGARA... WHAT SHOULD WE DO...?
CRUMPLE
PLEASE... GIVE ME A LITTLE TIME TO THINK.

YOU THERE, TRAVELERS!
YES...? WHAT IS IT?
WE'RE SEARCHING FOR SOMEONE.
YOU HAVEN'T SEEN A GROUP CALLING THEMSELVES THE "SEKIHOUTAI" AROUND HERE, HAVE YOU?
THE "SEKIHOUTAI"... HE MUST MEAN SAGARA AND HIS MEN...!
N-NO...
I SEE. THAT'S JUST AS WELL.
THEY'RE A PACK OF NO-GOOD SERIAL ROBBERS. BE CAREFUL OUT THERE.
WHAT!?
HANG ON, WHAT DO YOU MEAN...?
HMPH.
SERVES HIM RIGHT.


WHAT ARE YOU ON ABOUT NOW?
THOSE WERE SOLDIERS OF THE SHOGUN'S ARMY.

IT LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE HAS BEEN SPREADING NASTY RUMORS.
AH, WELL...


IT SEEMS THE SEKIHOUTAI IS ALREADY DRAWING ATTENTION FROM ALL SIDES.
BUT ...

DOING AWAY WITH ...?
YOU'RE GOING TO KILL THOSE MEN!?

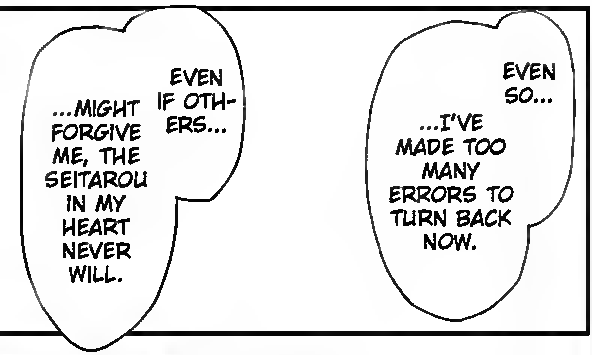
LET'S FOLLOW THEM.
HUH?
NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY, I THINK YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT SAGARA-HAN.
WORRIED? DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH.
I'M MERELY DOING AWAY WITH ANYONE WHO MIGHT GET TO HIM FIRST.

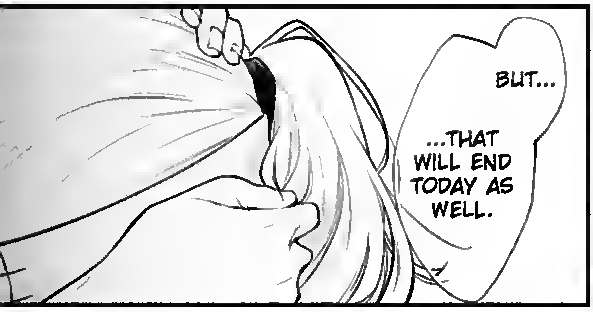
NOW SEE HERE...I TOLD YOU TO STOP THAT!
YOU'VE BEEN SO GOOD LATELY...
ONLY BECAUSE I HAD NO ONE TO KILL.
YOU'RE WRONG! YOU SAY YOU WANT TO KILL HIM AND END THIS...
...BUT IN YOUR HEART OF HEARTS, YOU DON'T BELIEVE THAT!
YOU'VE MADE A LOT OF MISTAKES, IT'S TRUE...
...BUT IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO STOP.
PLEASE, LET IT GO.
I CAN'T ...
EVEN IF *THAT* WAS YOU...
I DON'T WANT TO WATCH...
...ANY-ONE ELSE DIE

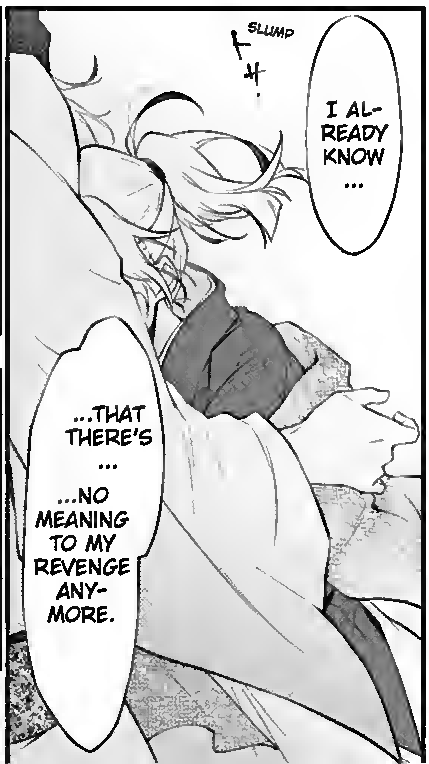
VERY WELL.
SIGH

I WON'T ...
...MAKE YOU WATCH ANYONE ELSE DIE.
WHAT ...?

WHAM
KAHK...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO... ... WATCH AT ALL ANY-MORE.


EVEN IF OTH-ERS... ...MIGHT FORGIVE ME, THE SEITAROU IN MY HEART NEVER WILL.
EVEN SO... ...I'VE MADE TOO MANY ERRORS TO TURN BACK NOW.


BUT... ...THAT WILL END TODAY AS WELL.


SLUMP
I AL-READY KNOW ...
...THAT THERE'S ... ...NO MEANING TO MY REVENGE ANY-MORE.

SA-
GARA?
ARE
YOU
OKAY?

IT ALL
ENDS
TODAY...
...ONE
WAY OR
ANOTHER.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY SO MUCH.
WE ALL BELIEVE IN YOU, AND WE'LL FOLLOW YOU.
SO JUST STICK TO WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN, THE WAY YOU ALWAYS—
I DON'T KNOW ...
...WHAT TO BELIEVE.

IF I ERR IN MY JUDGMENT NOW...
...I MAY PLUNGE US ALL INTO A STATE FROM WHICH THERE WILL BE NO RETURN.
四郎
SO MANY PEOPLE ...
MY FRIENDS ...
I'VE CARRIED YOUR DREAMS IN MY HEART...
...THROUGH SO MANY STRUGGLES.
WE'VE...
...COME TO THIS AT LAST.

SA...
GARA
...
SLAM
I
DON'T...
...KNOW
WHAT
TO DO!!
IT IS
EXACTLY
BECAUSE
YOU ALL
BELIEVE
IN ME
THAT I
MUST...
CLENCH
KSHING
KACHAK

YOU'RE IN MY WAY.
AAAAARGH!
THUMP
THUMP
...!!?
MY, HOW FAR YOU'VE FALLEN, SAGARA.

SHI-
KYOU!

YANK
BESET WITH DREADFUL RUMORS AND SICK AT HEART...
YOU'RE IN SUCH A STATE, YOU DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE THE SHOGUN'S MEN BEHIND YOU.

SHOVE
HERE, TAKE HER BACK.
!!
WHUMP
DON'T FUSS SO. SHE'S SIMPLY TOO MUCH TROUBLE AWAKE.
YOU BASTARD, WHAT DID YOU DO TO HER!?
YOSHI-NO...!?
CHAK
DRAW.
SAGARA.

I...
I...

LUNGE
SHIKYOU, PLEASE WAIT!
IF IT'S REVENGE YOU WANT, PLEASE JUST STOP!
SAGARA HAS SUFFERED JUST AS MUCH AS YOU!
THAT'S WHY YOU'VE GOT TO WORK TOGETHER NOW FOR THE SAKE OF SEITAROU'S DREAMS!
SO PLEASE... I'M BEGGING YOU... STOP FIGHTING...

SHI-KYOU!!
GRIT
SA-GARA, YOU...
...ARE ALL BOUND UP WITH MY MEMORIES OF SEI-TAROU...
...BUT I'M SO BROKEN DOWN NOW...
THAT FACE OF YOURS ...
...TRULY MAD-DENS ME.
WHAT...
...WAS I HOPING FOR?

PERHAPS I JUST WANTED YOU...
...TO KILL ME AND END ALL OF THIS!
BUT...
...I'VE HAD ENOUGH.
I'LL...
...PUT YOU OUT OF YOUR MISERY!
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO WILL DIE.
SA-GARA.

JANGLE
!!?
ENVELOPE: TO SHIROU
FLASH

Shikyou...
SEI...
Look after Shirou for me.
SEITA-ROU—

SPLASH
WHOOM

BLUB
BLUB
BLUB
THEY'RE GONE...?

SPLASH
BLUB
BURBLE
BLUB
BLUB
PWAH!

KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
WH...
WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT!?
THIS IS...
HIKAWA SHRINE ...?
WHY ...?
MURMUR
MURMUR
MURMUR
HEY!
TH- THERE ARE PEOPLE IN THE POND!
SHAKE SHAKE
HUH ...?
MURMUR
CHATTER
CHATTER
MURMUR

HUH ...!?

HUH?
WHA ...?
WHAT, THE ...!?
UM, EXCUSE ME! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT!?
GAH!

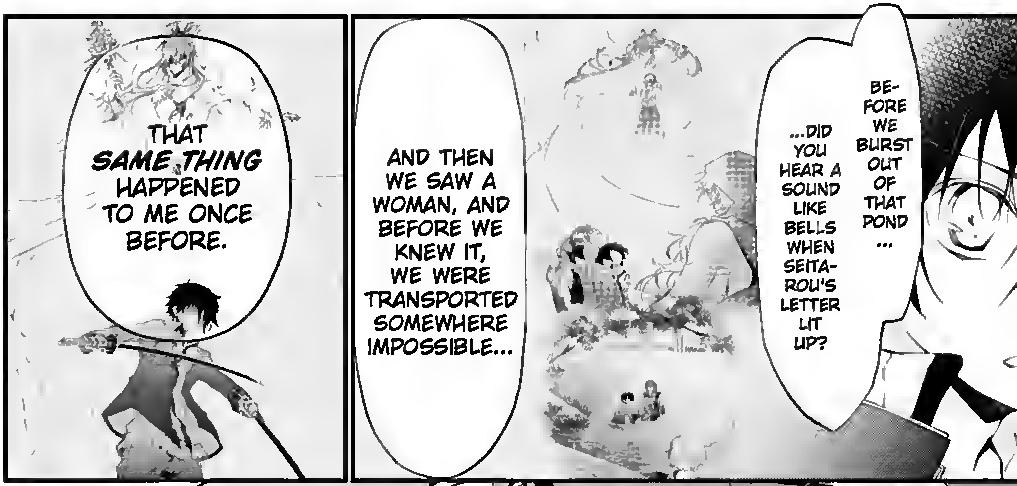
...
A SWORD?
FLINCH
ギクーッ
WESTERN CLOTHES...!
I'M CALLING THE SHRINE STAFF, OKAY?

IN THAT CASE, ISN'T THIS A LITTLE FISHY?
ARE THEY BUMS?
OH, NO?
SO... ...ARE THEY NOT FILMING?
DO YOU SEE ANY?
CAMERAS?
BUT WHERE ARE THE CAMERAS?
HE SAYS IT'S FOR A DRAMA
WOW, FOR A TV SHOW!
WHAT? THEY'RE FILMING?
IT MUST BE A FAKE SWORD!
OHHH! ARE YOU GUYS FILMING A PERIOD PIECE OR SOMETHING!?
DOOM
ドドド
HUH!?
NO, WE'RE NOT--!

ZOOM
ビュー
SPLASH
ザバーン!!
WHAT!!?
LET'S GET OUTTA HERE!
GRAB
ガシッ
SAGARA!
MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL THE POLICE...
THERE'S A POLICE STATION NEARBY!
DRIP
ポタ
DRIP

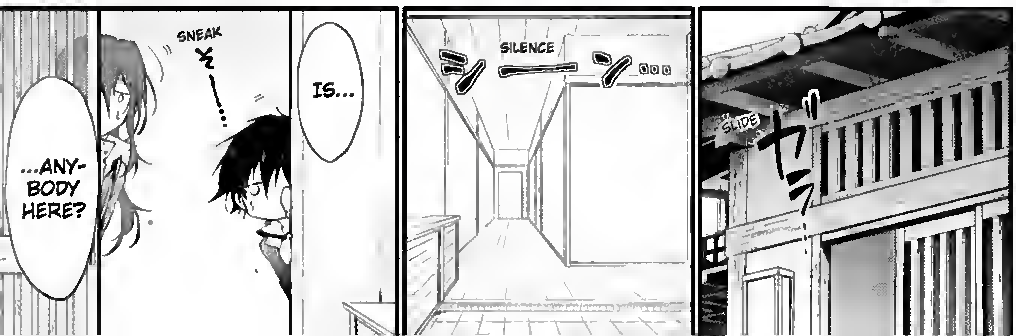
HUFF...
HUFF!
HUFF!
K... KOTETSU!
WHY DID WE RUN AWAY SO SUDDENLY?
AND...
...ISN'T THIS SEITAROU'S HOUSE?
WE HAD TO, OKAY? WITH THE WAY YOU'RE DRESSED NOW...
HFF!
SOAKING WET...
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU CAME RIGHT OUT OF "JAPAN'S MOST WANTED"!
CARRYING A (LIVE STEEL) BLADE ...
"MOST WANTED"? BY WHOM?
IF WE DRAW A CROWD LIKE THAT AGAIN, THEY'LL TAKE YOU IN FOR QUESTIONING!
BY THE POLICE, OKAY?

WHAT WAS ALL THAT BUSINESS WITH THE SUDDEN CROWD JUST NOW?
THAT'S RIGHT!
WHEN DID SUCH MIGHTY DROVES ARRIVE?
WHAT DID THEY WANT WITH US?
AND WHY WERE THEY ALL DRESSED IN SUCH PECULIAR, MOTLEY GARB?
IT LOOKED VERY MUCH LIKE WHAT...
... YOU ...
... WEAR ...


BEFORE WE BURST OUT OF THAT POND ...
...DID YOU HEAR A SOUND LIKE BELLS WHEN SEITA-ROU'S LETTER LIT UP?
AND THEN WE SAW A WOMAN, AND BEFORE WE KNEW IT, WE WERE TRANSPORTED SOMEWHERE IMPOSSIBLE...
THAT SAME THING HAPPENED TO ME ONCE BEFORE.

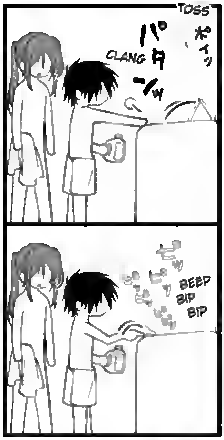
THIS IS MY OWN TIME...
THE YEAR 2017.

Chapter 24: Faraway Futures and Willful Ways



ALL RIGHT...
WE STINK LIKE THAT POND, SO LET'S TAKE A SHOWER FOR NOW. WE CAN TALK MORE AFTER THAT...
CLATTER
RSTL RSTL
TAKE A... ...
"SHOWER"?
YEAH...
I MEAN, GET IN THE BATH!
C'MON, THIS WAY.

EHHH!?
WHAT'S THIS!? THAT BOX IS MOVING ON ITS OWN!
PUNCH
CLUNK-A
CLINK
VWRRR

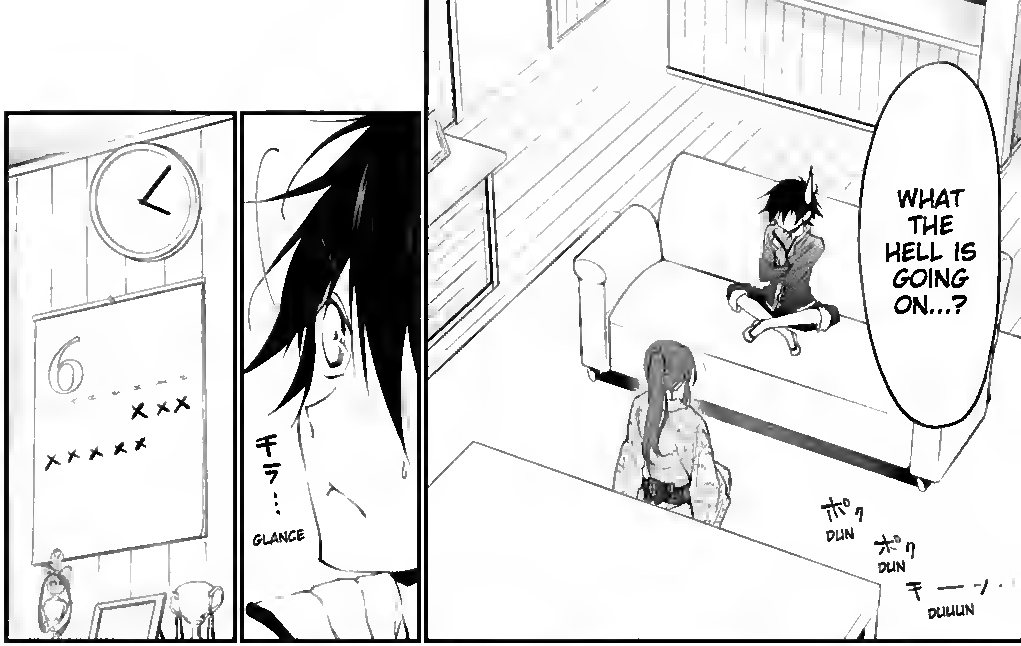

CLANG
TOSS
BEEP BIP BIP

THIS JACKET... SHOULD PROBABLY BE HAND-WASHED, HUH...?
I'LL PUT IT HERE.

"ELECTRICITY"...?
"AUTOMATICALLY"...!?

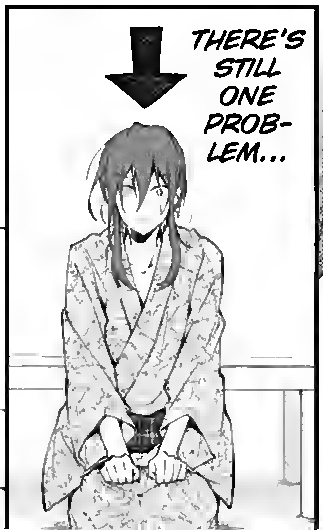
IT'S A WASHING MACHINE.
IT RUNS ON ELECTRICITY.
IT DOES ALL THE WASHING AUTOMATICALLY.

FSSSH
ブシャアアッ
CLATTER
ガタッ
UWAAAH!?
SLIP
ツルッ
FLINCH
ビクッ
SQUEAK
キュイッ
OKAY, IF YOU TURN IT HERE, HOT WATER COMES OUT OF THE SHOWER HEAD...
SPLISH
ピチャッ
GIVE ME SOME!
WHAT IS THAT FOAM?
I WISH TO TRY IT!
VWRRR
DON'T OVERDO IT, YOU'LL FRY YOUR HAIR.
FLAPPA
OKAY.
INDEED... THEY WOULD BE A BIT SHORT.
YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO WEAR YAYOI'S CLOTHES...
MINE ARE NO GOOD
WAIT! IT'S ILLEGAL TO CARRY A SWORD HERE!
EH?
ALL SET.


WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON...?
ポン DUN
ポン DUN
キーン DUUUN
チラ... GLANCE

IT'S ONLY THE DAY AFTER I GOT THROWN BACK TO THE EDO PERIOD...
I GUESS NOT AS MUCH TIME PASSED HERE AS I SPENT BACK THERE, HUH?
I MUST NOT BE LISTED AS MISSING OR ANY-THING...
AND BY THE CLOCK, I'VE GOT A FEW HOURS UNTIL MOM AND YAYOI GET HOME...

WHAM
WHAM
ARRRGH
WHAT THE HELL 'ARE WE GONNA DO NOW!?
K...
KOTE-TSU...

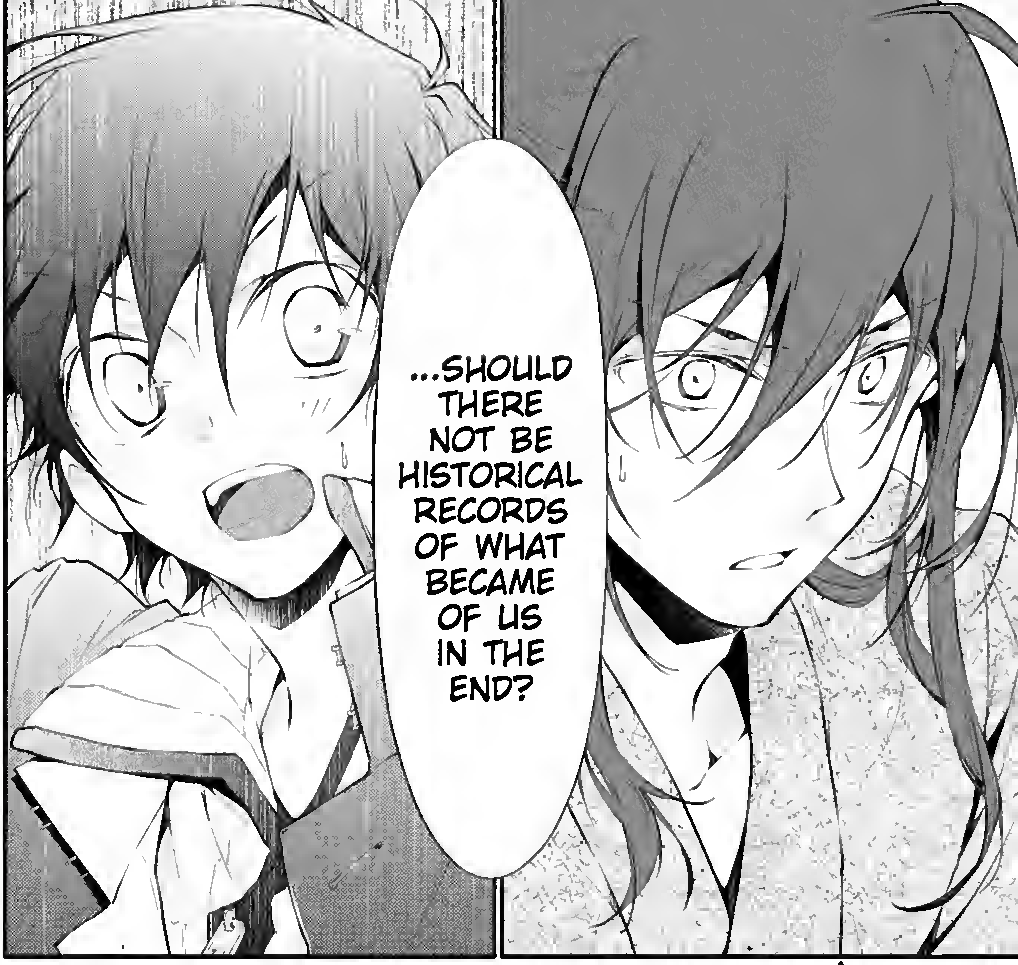

THERE'S STILL ONE PROB-LEM...

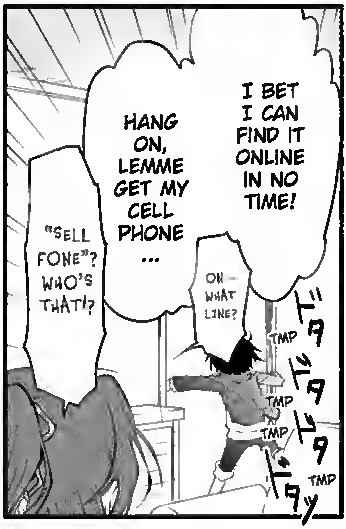
BUT...
I OUGHT TO BE SUPER EXCITED TO FINALLY BE BACK IN THE PRESENT.

UH...
GO AHEAD, SAGARA-SAN...
BY THE WAY, KNEELING TO FACE THE SOFA LIKE THAT IS A LITTLE WEIRD...
OH, I SEE...
I'VE SEEN MANY MARVELOUS GOODS IN THIS HOUSE ...
...AND I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS TRULY THE FUTURE.
THERE...
...ONE THING I SHOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU.

STILL, WE ARE IN THE VERY MIDST OF OUR MISSION TO MARCH ALONG THE TO-SANDO...
...AND ON THE BRINK OF DECIDING WHETHER TO MARCH ON OR NOT...
...AND I'VE BEEN TERRIBLY WORRIED ABOUT EVERYONE IN THE SEKI-HOUTAI.

HOWEVER IF THIS IS THE FUTURE...


...SHOULD THERE NOT BE HISTORICAL RECORDS OF WHAT BECAME OF US IN THE END?


I BET I CAN FIND IT ONLINE IN NO TIME!
HANG ON, LEMME GET MY CELL PHONE ...
"SELL FONE"? WHO'S THAT!?
ON— WHAT LINE?
TMP
TMP
TMP
TMP

LEAP
THAT'S RIGHT!
SAGARA, YOU'RE A GENIUS!

SKSH
...
HE...
...SKIPPED PRACTICE.
NII-CHAN...
YOU NEVER CAME HOME LAST NIGHT. WHERE DID YOU GO...?
MY FRIENDS SAID IT WAS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, BUT...
WHAT? YOUR BROTHER DIDN'T COME HOME? HAPPENS ALL THE TIME!
EH?!
YEAH, MINE'S THE SAME WAY.
HE'LL BE BACK WHEN HE GETS HUNGRY, RIGHT?
SURE, I MAY BE...
IT'S WORSE THAN HIM BEING GONE FOR ONE NIGHT.
WE'VE NEVER HAD A FIGHT THAT HUGE BEFORE...
SIGH...

WHAT COUNTS AS A "NORMAL SIBLING QUARREL," THOUGH?
WE'VE ALWAYS MANAGED TO MAKE UP AFTER OUR NORMAL SIBLING QUARRELS.
CLENCH
SLIDE
I'M HOME ...
AHA!
HUH ...?

SCREEN: SOUZOU SAGARA, SEKIHOUTAI

ガタッ
CLATTER
NII-CHAN !?

OH...
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
スッ
ズオ
ズオ
スッ
OOKI...
...NO, YOU'RE ...
...YAYOI!?
WHERE WERE YOU LAST NIGHT!?
YOU IDIOT!

RUNNING OFF WITHOUT A WORD LIKE THAT...
I WAS SO WOR-RIED!
YOU IDIOT...
STARE
ぽか――ん…
AH!
.....
.....
UH...
UM...S-SORRY... I CALLED YOU AN IDIOT... TWICE...
HA HA...
SORRY... IT'S REALLY NOTHING TO LAUGH ABOUT BUT...
WELL ... I GUESS ...
I WAS PRETTY WOR-RIED...
...ABOUT YOU TOO.

GRAB
SORRY, THOUGH.
THIS ISN'T THE RIGHT TIME FOR THAT.
STAND
WE CAN TALK LATER!
WHAT!?
SAGA-RA!
LET'S GO!
I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!

STUNNED
きょとん…
DID...
...MY BROTHER JUST BRUSH ME OFF...
...AND SAY "THIS ISN'T THE TIME"?
WHAT HAP-PENED TO HIM...
...IN JUST ONE NIGHT?
WHAT'S UP WITH HIM?
DIS-APPEARING ALL OF A SUDDEN...
...COMING BACK LIKE IT WAS NOTH-ING...
...NOT THINKING ABOUT HOW I FEEL...
FLOP
ほ!!
す?

THEN AGAIN, I...

BUT SOMEHOW...
...I FEEL CLOSER TO HIM THAN I HAVE IN A LONG TIME.
...AND TREATED EACH OTHER LIKE SECOND-BEST.
WE BLURTED OUT WHAT WE WANTED TO SAY WITHOUT THINKING...

BUT...
...AND RESTLESS.
I FEEL STRANGE...
WHAT IS THIS FEELING?

IT'S NOT SO BAD.

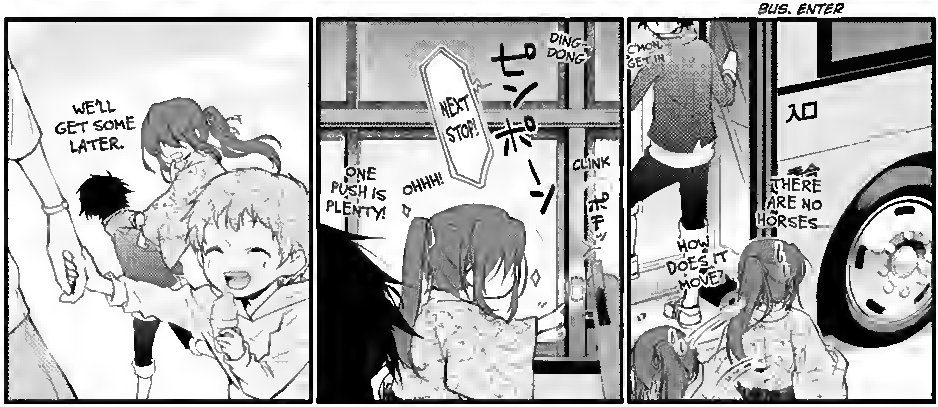
OH...
BUT...

WHO WAS THAT GUY...
...WEAR-ING MY CLOTHES?

COME TO THINK OF IT...
...IS THIS ALL RIGHT?
DIDN'T YOU TWO PART ON BAD TERMS?
SURELY YOU HAVE MUCH TO TALK ABOUT...
K-KOTETSU! WAS THAT FELLOW YOUR—
YEAH! MY BROTHER, YAYOI!
LOOKS JUST LIKE OOKI, HUH?
IN-DEED... HE IS TRULY A LIVING POR-TRAIT OF HIM...
WE'RE OKAY!
SOME-HOW I KNEW THAT...
...WHEN I SAW HIM JUST NOW.
I SEE...
ANYWAY, WE HAVE TO FOCUS ON THE SEKIHOUTA! NOW.

YOU CAN'T RELY ON INFORMATION FROM THE INTERNET. SO LET'S GO TO THE LIBRARY!
THEY SHOULD HAVE BOOKS THERE WITH THE REAL FACTS FROM HISTORY!
VERY WELL.

PSHHHT


BUS. ENTER
WE'LL GET SOME LATER.
NEXT STOP!
DING-DONG
ONE PUSH IS PLENTY!
OHHH!
CLINK
C'MON, GET IN
入口
THERE ARE NO HORSES
HOW DOES IT MOVE?

SO... SO MANY BOOKS...
I'D LIKE THESE, PLEASE
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
HEY...
DID YOU FINISH THAT ESSAY ON YOUR DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE?

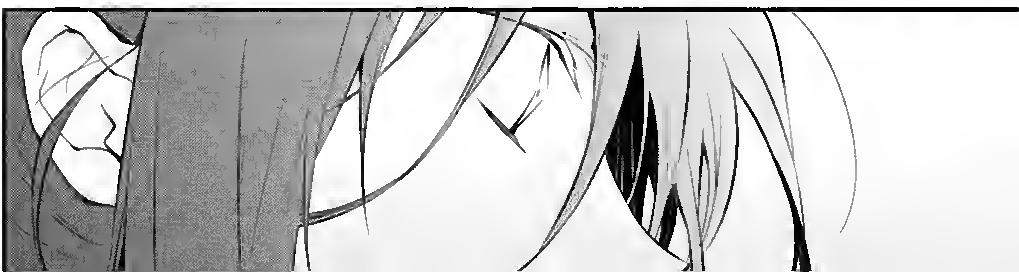
I WANT TO BE A PROFESSIONAL PIANIST!
IT'S BEEN MY DREAM SINCE PRESCHOOL.
WHAT DID YOU WRITE, YUU-CHAN?
MAYBE I COULD BE A TEACHER... OR A NURSE WOULD BE COOL TOO... I CAN'T DECIDE...
I'M NOT DONE YET EITHER ...
OH! I FORGOT! WE'VE GOT TILL TOMORROW, RIGHT?
YOU'RE RIGHT ...!
IT'D BE GREAT TO GET A JOB DOING WHAT I LOVE!
THERE ARE LOTS OF COMPANIES THAT DO THAT!
WELL, HOW ABOUT BEING SOMEONE WHO DESIGNS VIDEO GAMES!?
BEEP
BOOP
I DON'T LIKE ANYTHING MUCH, BESIDES PLAYING VIDEO GAMES...
MUST BE NICE HAVING A SPECIAL TALENT...
SUCH YOUNG CHILDREN, ALREADY THINKING OF THEIR OWN FUTURES...
WELL, WELL...
TMP
TMP
TMP
I'M GONNA WRITE IT AS SOON AS I GET HOME!

WHOOSH

HUH? YAYOI'S GONE...
WELL, I GUESS THAT'S GOOD.
I'M GONNA LOOK OVER THESE BOOKS FIRST, SO...
...YOU STAY HERE AND WATCH TV OR SOMETHING.
HERE
BLINK
BEEP
SHWIP
OHHHH! THERE ARE PEOPLE INSIDE THIS BOARD!
GIVE IT A REST ALREADY...
CLENCH
.....
THIS IS SIMPLY AMAZING, KOTETSU!
HOW MANY PEOPLE DWELL IN THAT "TEEVEE" OF YOURS!?

GULP GULP
ゴキュ ゴキュ
AND THE BUBBLY SENSATION FROM THIS DRINK CALLED "KO-LA" IS QUITE INDESCRIB-ABLE!
TRMBL TRMBL
ビ ビ
THE FUTURE IS SO FULL OF MARVELS ...
SAGA-RA.

DON'T GO BACK TO THE PAST.



ARE YOU TELLING ME...
...TO ABANDON THE SEKIHOUTAI?
JUST DON'T GO BACK!
SLAM
FLUTTER
FLUTTER
FLUTTER
I CAN TELL...
...SIMPLY BY LOOKING AT YOU. OUR FATE IS...

OUR FATE IS...
...NOT A HAPPY ONE, IS IT?
THE INTER-NET...
...AND THOSE BOOKS ...
...THEY ALL SAY THE SAME THING.
"THE SEKI-HOUTAI...

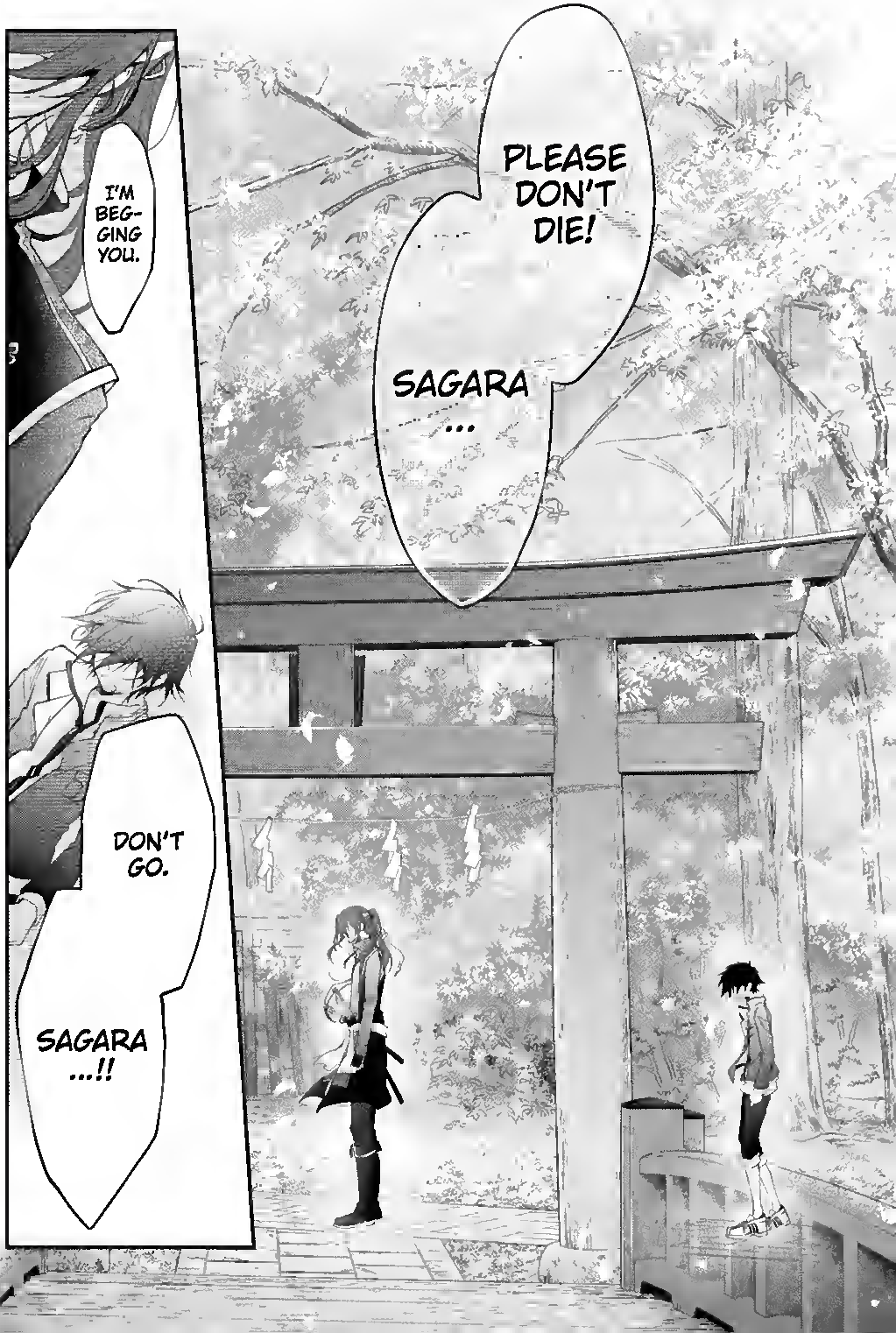
"...WAS BRANDED AS A FALSE ARMY...
"...AND PUT TO DEATH."
BOOK: ON MARCH 3, KEIOU 4, THEY WERE ARRESTED IN SHIMOSUWA AND BEHEADED.
PLEASE. DON'T GO.
I... ...DON'T WANT ANY MORE MEMORIES LIKE WHAT HAPPENED TO RYOU-MA...

RUSTLE
RUSTLE
.....
SAGA-
RA...
KCHAK
FLAP
FLAP
CLTTR
RUSTLE
SHFF
WHY...
...ARE YOU
CHANGING
CLOTHES?
SO YOU'RE
TELLING ME
TO LET MY
COMPANIONS
DIE ALONE!?
AND
UNDER
FALSE
CHARGES
TOO!!
IF YOU
GO BACK
TO THE
PAST,
YOU'RE
GOING
TO DIE!
DIDN'T
I TELL
YOU
NOT TO
GO!?

NO! BUT...
...YOU'RE UP AGAINST THE NEW GOVERNMENT, WHO SCOFFED AT THE SHOGUNATE!
I DON'T LIKE SAYING THIS, BUT...
... THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO ON YOUR OWN!
EVEN IF I CANNOT DO ANYTHING...
...I MUST GO BACK.
YANK
SURELY YOU REALIZE AS WELL AS I DO...
...WHY LORD RYOUMA FOLLOWED THE COURSE OF HISTORY.

SAGA-RA...!
KCHAK
CLANK
SAGARA, WAIT!
YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO GET BACK...
I CAN HEAR THE BELLS.
HUH!?
IT FEELS AS THOUGH THEY'RE CALLING ME.
WHAT!? I NEVER EVEN...
HEY...
WAIT, SAGA-RA!
...
I...I DON'T WANT YOU TO DIE!
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS TO HISTORY!
LETTING IT END LIKE THIS...
IT'S ALL WRONG!

...TRUE HERO...
...THAT I'VE EVER KNOWN!
YOU ALWAYS STUCK TO WHAT YOU BELIEVED WAS RIGHT...
...AND FOUGHT FOR YOUR COUN-TRY...
SOME-ONE LIKE YOU...
...BEING BRANDED A TRAITOR AND KILLED... I CAN'T STAND IT!
EVERY-THING I KNOW ABOUT BEING STRONG...
...AND STERN... AND KIND... I LEARNED IT ALL BECAUSE I MET YOU!
YOU HAVE SO MANY THINGS THAT I'VE NEVER HAD!
THERE'S STILL SO MUCH THAT I WANT TO LEARN FROM YOU!
YOU...
YOU'RE THE ONLY...


I'M BEG-GING YOU.
PLEASE DON'T DIE!
SAGARA ...
DON'T GO.
SAGARA ...!!

WHOOSH
OH...

THAT'S RIGHT... HIS FACE...
I'VE SEEN THAT LOOK BEFORE...
KOTE-TSU...

IT'S ALL RIGHT.
YOU'VE ALREADY ...

JANGLE

SAGA
...
...RA
...
NO!
WAIT...

SAGARAAA...!!

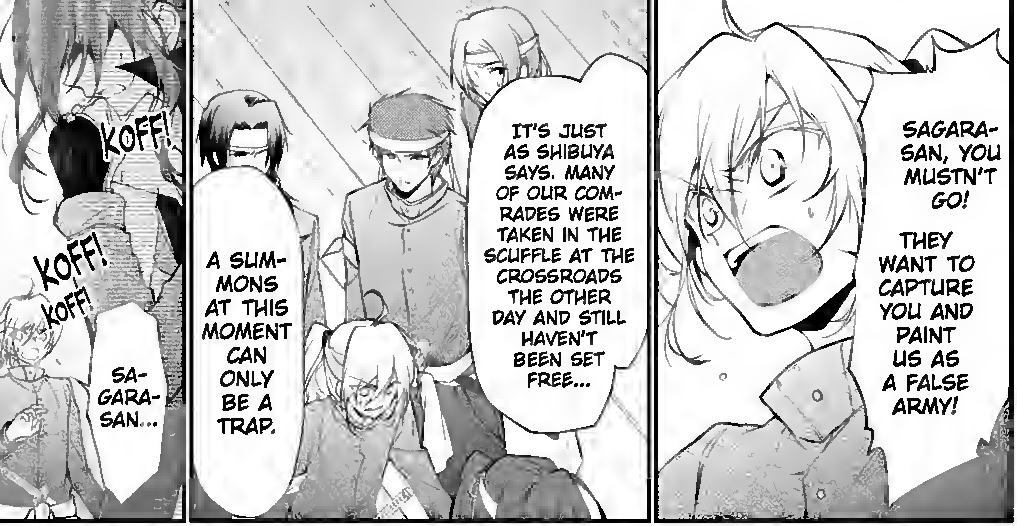
IF I NEVER ...
...LET GO OF YOUR HAND ...
Final Chapter
SAGA-RA...
WOULD YOU...?

NII-CHAN...!
I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE AWAKE!
YAYOI...
LURCH
OH...I SEE...
HE WENT BACK...
HUH?
YOU COL-LAPSED AT HIKAWA SHRINE.
YOU WERE ALONE WHEN I FOUND YOU...WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MAN WHO WAS WITH YOU LAST NIGHT?
OW...
WINCE
WHAT...
...HAP-PENED TO ME?

...THE COURSE OF HISTORY...
TO FOLLOW...
EVERY-ONE...
SAGA-RA...

MARCH 1, KEIOU 4
SHIMOSUWA STATION, SHINANO PROVINCE
A SUMMONS FROM THE NEW GOVERNMENT!?
YES.
KOFF!
THIS CONCERNS THE WAR COUNCIL. I WILL GO ALONE TO THEIR HEADQUARTERS IN SHIMOSUWA.
PLEASE, ALL OF YOU, CONTINUE TO MARCH.

Final Chapter: The Promised Time


SAGARA-SAN, YOU MUSTN'T GO!
THEY WANT TO CAPTURE YOU AND PAINT US AS A FALSE ARMY!
IT'S JUST AS SHIBUYA SAYS. MANY OF OUR COMRADES WERE TAKEN IN THE SCUFFLE AT THE CROSSROADS THE OTHER DAY AND STILL HAVEN'T BEEN SET FREE...
A SUMMONS AT THIS MOMENT CAN ONLY BE A TRAP.
KOFF!
KOFF!
SA-GARA-SAN...

CAPTAIN... YOU'VE BEEN ASKING TOO MUCH OF YOURSELF.
AT LEAST REST A WHILE BEFORE YOU GO...
THERE'S NO TIME FOR THAT!
FLINCH

THIS IS AN ORDER FROM YOUR CAPTAIN.
I WILL RESPOND TO THE SUMMONS ALONE.
ALL OF YOU, CONTINUE YOUR MARCH.

IN THE HISTORY OF THE SEKIHOUTAI THAT I SAW IN THOSE BOOKS FROM THE FUTURE... OUR LAST DAY WAS THE THIRD OF MARCH.
THIS SUMMONS IS LIKELY THEIR ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE US.
IF I TAKE FULL RESPONSI-BILITY AS OUR REPRESEN-TATIVE...
...THERE MAY BE A WAY TO SAVE THEM ALL...
I WON'T LET YOU!
YOU ALWAYS TRY...
...TO BEAR EVERYTHING YOURSELF WHEN TIMES ARE HARD.
CAN'T YOU RELY ON US FOR A CHANGE ...
...NOW THAT YOU'RE WORN DOWN TO A THREAD ?
WE'VE FOLLOWED YOU THIS FAR BECAUSE WE ADMIRE YOU! PLEASE, THINK OF HOW WE FEEL...!

I WON'T ...
...LET YOU GO ANY-WHERE ALONE!
"...TAKE ME WITH YOU!"
"PLEASE...
I KNOW THAT LOOK.
NO MATTER WHAT I SAY, YOU WON'T LISTEN...
WILL YOU CURSE ME...
...FOR BINDING OUR FATES TOGETH-ER?
NO...
EVEN IF YOU DID, I WOULDN'T MIND.
OOKI.
PLEASE, COME AS MY GUARD.

THE REST OF YOU, KEEP MARCHING.
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
RSTL
RUSTLE
HEY...
WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING?
SOU-JI--
YOU WEIGH A TON
HMM? CAN'T YOU TELL? WE'RE TAILING THEM!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, TAKENUKI-CHAN?
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?
I'M FOLLOWING THEM.

GRIND
SOUJI.
THAT HURTS.
OUR ELBOW.
OH! SORRY, NISHI-YANI
AND AREN'T YOU THE ONE WHO GOT SOOO WORRIED, HE JUST HAD TO COME?
HEY, THE GREAT SHIBUYA DOESN'T BACK DOWN WHEN SOMEONE TELLS HIM "NO"!
REALLY, THOUGH... SHOULD YOU BE DOING THIS? HE WENT TO SUCH LENGTHS TO TELL US NOT TO COME...
HM?
WHUMP
RUSTLE
SHWIP
RUSTLE
!!?
WE'D BETTER MAKE SURE THEY DON'T NOTICE US FOR NOW...
I THOUGHT I HEARD SOMETHING JUST NOW...
NOTH-ING...
WHAT'S WRONG, OOKI?

A WILD BOAR?
PERHAPS...
WELL, WE'D BEST HURRY.
TRMP
TRMP
PHEW...
THEY'RE MOVING ON.
OUCH...
I THINK I HIT A REALLY HARD ROCK OR SOMETH—
KANE-SAN!?
AND TAKAYAMA-KUN AND EVEN KOMATSU-CHAN!?
H-HUH!?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
SIZZLE
AH HA HA...
LOOKS LIKE WE ALL BROKE OUR WORD AND FOLLOWED THEM...
DAMMIT, KANE-SAN, YOUR SKULL IS ROCK-HARD!
KANE-SAN, YOU ROCK HEAD!
IT'S PROBABLE 'COS HE THINKS SO HARD.
GAH, EH.
IT SEEMS...
...WE ALL THOUGHT ALIKE.

SHIMOSUWA HEADQUARTERS, IWANAMI MANSION
CAP-TAIN. PLEASE, DON'T PUSH YOUR-SELF...
KFF!
KFF!
NO... I'M FINE ...
I'M SORRY.
KOFF!
OOKI?
YES?
LET'S GO.
GRIT
...?
DON'T BE...
KFF!

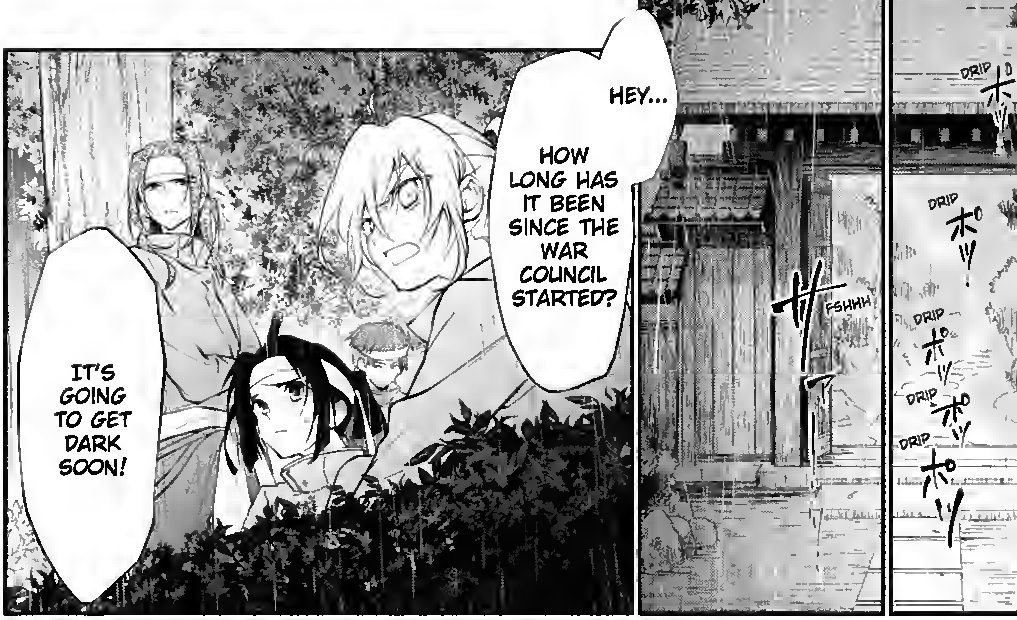
I AM SOUZOU SAGARA CAPTAIN OF THE FIRST UNIT OF THE SEKI-HOUTAI.
I RECEIVED YOUR SUMMONS TO THE WAR COUNCIL AND...
SLIDE
SKSH
CLATTER
SCUFFLE

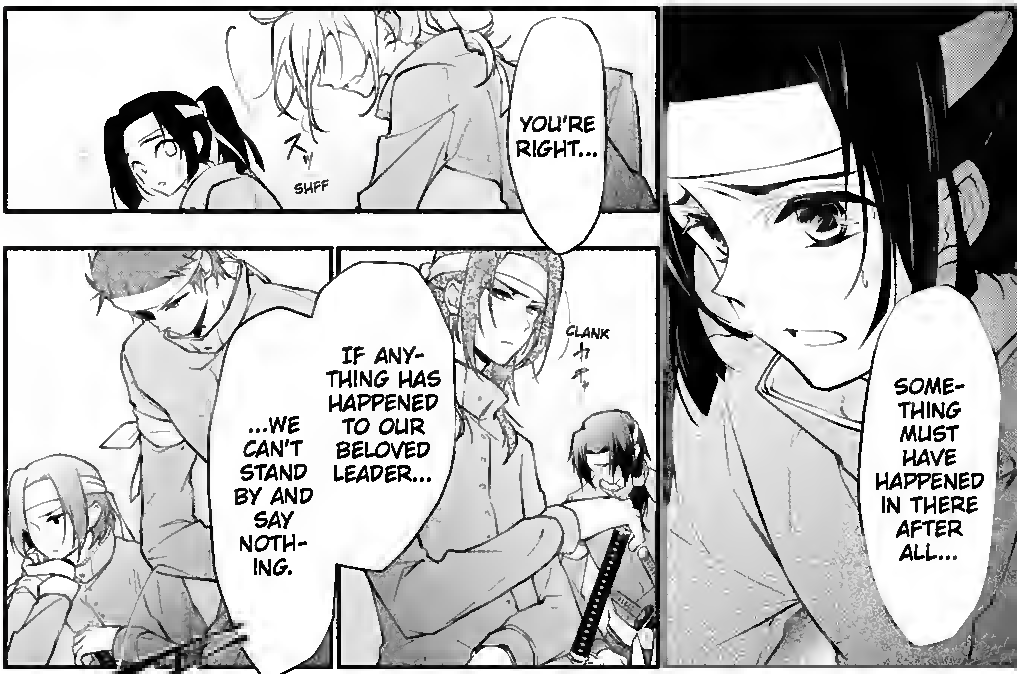
COME WITH US!
HEY!
HOW ...
HOW DARE YOUUU!?
SLASH

DON'T YOU LAY A HAND ON THE CAP-TAIN!
OOKI, STAND DOWN!

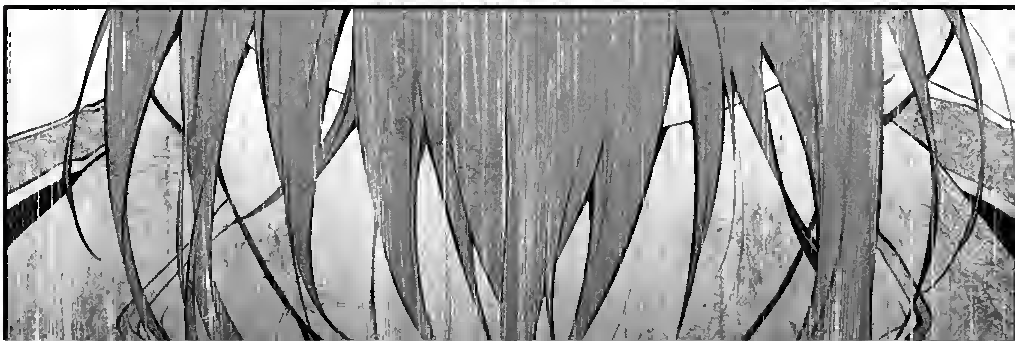
C...
CAP-TAIN ...
STAND DOWN ...
OOK! ...

SOUZOU SAGARA, LEADER OF THE FALSE ARMY KNOWN AS THE SEKI-HOU-TAI...
...I HEREBY ARREST YOU AND YOUR UNDER-LING...
CLANG
...FOR THE CRIMES OF VIOLENT ASSAULT, THEFT OF MONEY AND GOODS, AND DECEIVING YOUR FELLOW CITIZENS.


HEY...
HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE THE WAR COUNCIL STARTED?
IT'S GOING TO GET DARK SOON!
FSHHH
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
DRIP


YOU'RE RIGHT...
SHFF
IF ANY-THING HAS HAPPENED TO OUR BELOVED LEADER...
...WE CAN'T STAND BY AND SAY NOTH-ING.
CLANK
SOME-THING MUST HAVE HAPPENED IN THERE AFTER ALL...

LET'S GO GET THEM.
FSSSHHH



WHAT THE HELL IS THIS!?
THEY'RE GONNA BEHEAD US TOMORROW WITHOUT LISTENING TO A WORD WE SAY!?
GET IWA-KURA OUT HERE NOW!
FSSSHH
DAMN IT...
"LET OUR FRIENDS GO!"
AND THE REST OF YOU! WHY'D YOU JUST GO QUIETLY!?
"STOP IT!"
"HUNH!? OOKI...!?"
"THESE ARE... THE CAPTAIN'S ORDERS..."
WE CAN'T GIVE IN TO THIS MADNESS SO EASILY!
YANK
YANK
DAMN IT!
HEY!
IWAKURA! GET OUT HERE!
LISTEN TO ME!
SOU-JI...

WHY...
...ARE YOU APOLOGIZING?
I'M SORRY.
WE FOLLOWED YOU BECAUSE WE LOVE YOU!
BUT...
...WHY DON'T YOU EVER THINK OF ANYTHING BUT US...!?
PLEASE ... WILL YOU LISTEN TO ME?
...

I SAW...
...THE FUTURE ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS FROM NOW.
HUH?
IT WAS KOTE-TSU.
HE WAS FROM A FUTURE JAPAN...ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AFTER OUR OWN.

I SAW...
...HOW THE PEOPLE OF THE FUTURE WILL LIVE...
...AND I KNOW WHAT OUR OWN LIVES WILL MEAN.
THE WORLD OF THE FUTURE WAS ADVANCED BEYOND MY WILDEST IMAGININGS.
FREEDOM AND EQUALITY...
THEY'D MOVED FAR BEYOND SUCH CONCEPTS.
EVERY ONE OF THEM, FROM INFANCY ON-WARD ...
...IS ABLE TO THINK OF THEIR OWN HAPPI-NESS AND ACT INDE-PENDENT-LY.
EVERY ONE OF THEM GLOWED WITH LIFE AND ENERGY.
IT WAS A WORLD OF PEACE AND PLENTY.

I'M SORRY ...
...FOR KEEPING SILENT AND GETTING YOU ALL MIXED UP IN THIS.
AND IN THAT FUTURE WORLD...
...I LEARNED OF OUR OWN EVENTUAL FATES.
I WON'T ASK YOU TO FORGIVE ME...
...BUT I HOPE YOU CAN UNDER-STAND ...
...THAT I...
...HAVE NOT GIVEN UP.
IF SUCH A FUTURE AWAITS...
...LONG AFTER OUR DEATHS...
...AND IF KOTETSU IS OUT THERE SOMEWHERE IN THAT FUTURE...

...THEN OUR SPIRITS WILL NEVER TRULY FADE AWAY.
HA HA...
IF THAT'S HOW IT IS...

...THEN WE CAN'T KEEP HANGING OUR HEADS, EH?
COME ON, OOKI!
KEEP THAT CHIN UP!
IT'S ALREADY UP.
BUMP
IT VEXES ME...
...TO LEAVE THE FUTURE IN THAT FOOL'S HANDS, BUT... AH, WELL.
SNIFF
IT ISN'T SO BAD.
HEY, CAP-TAIN!
WHAT IS IT, TAKAYA-MA?
TELL US ALL ABOUT IT, WON'T YOU?
YOUR JOURNEY TO THE FUTURE!

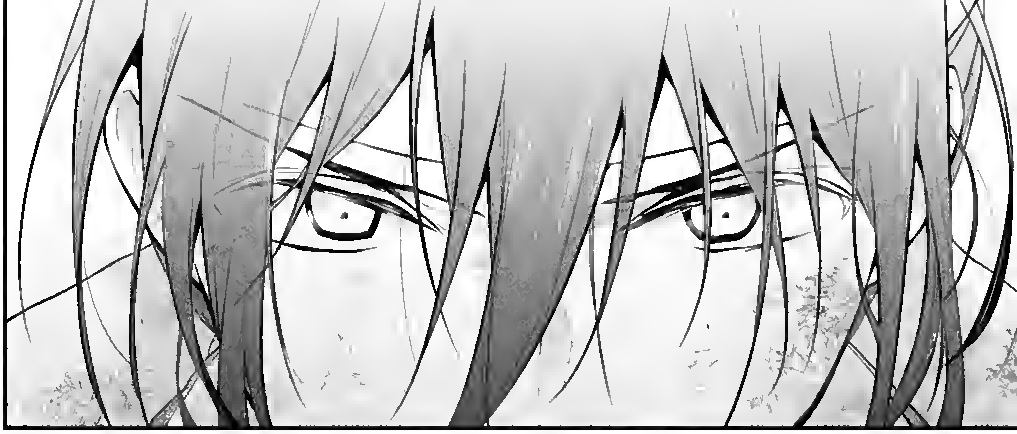
LET ME SEE...
BITE YOUR TONGUE, TAKAYAMA. THE CAPTAIN NEVER LIES.
WELL, YEAH, BUT...
KANEDA...
WHAT? WERE YOU LYING !?
YOU BELIEVE ME?
THERE WAS A STRANGE DEMON CALLED A "SHOWER" IN THE BATH...
...AND A BOX THAT DID THE WASHING UP ALL BY ITSELF.
TH-THERE ARE MONSTERS IN THE FUTURE?
HA HA!
KOMA-TSU-KUN, YOU SCARE TOO EASILY.
GREAT CROWDS OF PEOPLE RODE ON A THING CALLED A "BUS," WHICH MOVED WITHOUT HORSES TO DRAW IT...
...AND THERE WERE DWELLINGS CALLED "APARTMENTS" WITH STORIES UPON STORIES OF HOMES INSIDE, ALL BUILT OF STONE.
ALSO, THERE WERE BLOCKS OF STONE THAT GLOWED.
THE FUTURE SOUNDS LIKE A SCARY PLACE...
AND THEN THERE WAS A FROZEN SWEET CALLED "ICE CREAM" AND A BUBBLY BLACK MINERAL WATER CALLED "KO-LA"...
THEY WERE VERY TASTY ...
INDE-SCRIB-ABLY SO...
WHAT? YOU ATE SOME-THING THERE!?
THAT'S NOT FAIR, SA-GARA-SAN!

AH...
THAT'S RIGHT.
I'M NINETEEN YEARS OLD.
HA-HA, YOU LOOK EVEN YOUNGER WHEN YOU CRY, OOKI. ARE YOU OF AGE YET?
SOUJI, YOU NEVER CHANGE.
SAGARA-SAN, YOU DUMMY!
D, MMIT, I'D JUST MANAGED TO FORGET HOW HUNGRY I AM!
GURGLE
HA HA HA HA
EVER SINCE THAT DAY...
...THIS IS WHAT I'VE LONGED TO SEE...
...UPON THEIR FACES.
THOSE SMILES...

IT SEEMS ...
...THAT LORD SAGARA AND HIS MEN ARE TO BE BEHEADED TODAY.

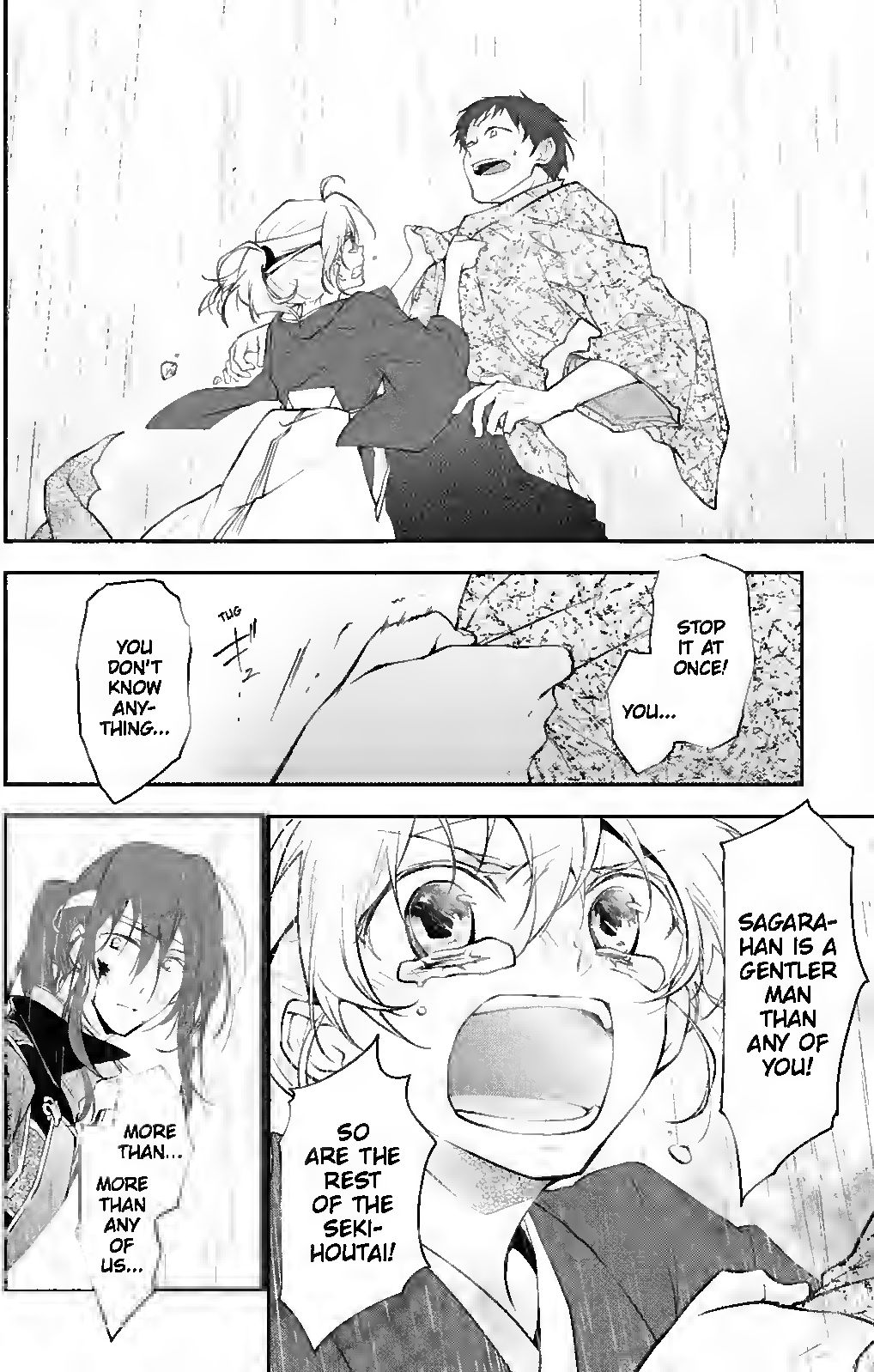
...?
DO YOU TRULY WANT THEM TO DIE IN VAIN!?
IF YOU HAVE TIME TO DITHER, USE IT TO PONDER OUR NEXT MOVE!
BE SILENT!
WHY MUST LORD SAGARA...!?
LORD IWAKURA, WHY...?
AND HIS DEATH WILL SAVE MANY OF THEIR LIVES...
WE KNOW NOT WHAT OTHER SACRIFICES MAY NEED TO BE MADE...
...TO ESTABLISH THIS NEW GOVERNMENT OF OURS.
HE MOVED THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE.
THAT MAN IS NEITHER NOBLE NOR SAMURAI...
SOUZOU SAGARA...
SAGARA'S DEATH SHALL NOT BE IN VAIN.

MURMUR
MURMUR
MURMUR
MURMUR
FSSSHHH
DON'T BE AFRAID TO DIE.
THERE'S NO REASON TO DESPAIR.



AFTER ALL, THE FUTURE IS OVERFLOWING WITH HOPE.

YOU WON'T LIVE LONG BY CLINGING TO YOUR SENSE OF JUSTICE.
THAT'S SIMPLY HOW IT IS.
DON'T TRY ANYTHING FOOLISH.
...
BUT ...
FLING
DAMN YOU FOR TRICK-ING US!
THUD


STOP IT AT ONCE!
YOU...
TUG
YOU DON'T KNOW ANY-THING...
SAGARA-HAN IS A GENTLER MAN THAN ANY OF YOU!
SO ARE THE REST OF THE SEKI-HOUTAI!
MORE THAN...
MORE THAN ANY OF US...

THEY ARE DETER-MINED ...
LOYAL...
HON-EST...
CHEER-FUL...
AND HELP-FUL...
THEY CARE FOR OTHERS ...
...AND ARE TRUE TO THEM-SELVES ...

THEY'RE BRAVE AND UPSTANDING, EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM!
AND YET...
...YOU'D CONDEMN THEM WITHOUT ANY PROOF!?
YOU IDIOTS !!

I HEARD IT WAS A RUMOR FROM THE CAPITAL...
I HEARD IT FROM AN ALE-HOUSE KEEPER...
MURMUR
MURMUR
MURMUR
HEY...COME TO THINK OF IT, WHO TOLD ME THE SEKIHOUTAI WAS A FALSE ARMY?
ISN'T THERE SOMETHING FISHY ABOUT ALL THIS!?
MURMUR
I DID HEAR AN INNKEEPER SAYING THEY'D PAID HIM HIS DUE.
MURMUR
...REALLY HOLD THEIR HEADS SO HIGH!?
COULD A LYING PACK OF CRIMI-NALS...
QUIET DOWN, ALL OF YOU!
SHOW US SOME PROOF THAT THEY PRETENDED TO BE THE IMPERIAL ARMY!
I HAVEN'T SEEN THE SEKIHOUTAI DOING ANYTHING WICKED!
CLAMOR
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE WITH THIS NEW GOVERN-MENT!?

CLAMOR
CLAMOR
ROAR
ROAR
YOU NEW OFFICIALS ARE COWARDS!
HURRY!
KILL THEM!!
EXPLAIN YOURSELVES!

MAKE IT CLEAN.

KCHAK

STRIKE TRUE.

KOTETSU.
DO YOU REMEMBER...
...WHAT I SAID TO YOU THAT DAY?

I'M ON MY WAY...
...TO KEEP MY WORD...

I'M ON MY WAY...
...TO KEEP MY WORD...

The final match of the boys' individual division in the 2019 All-Kanto High School Kendo Tournament...
...will now begin!
CLAMOR
In red, from Musashi Ichinomiya High School... Kotetsu Miyasaka!
In white, from Kaisei Academy... Yayoi Miyasaka!
宮坂
宮坂
ARMOR: MIYASAKA

LET'S GO, KOTE-TSU!
C'MON, YAYOI!

ROARRR
わぁぁ
RO..RRR
HAJI-ME!

UM!
EXCUSE ME...!
YOU MUST BE CHIHIRO KAWASE-SAN, RIGHT!?
I ADMIRE YOU SO MUCH... I WAS THINKING OF JOINING THE KAISEI ACADEMY KENDO CLUB NEXT YEAR!
AND, WELL, YOU SEE...
IF IT'S ALL RIGHT, WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO GIVE ME SOME ADVICE?

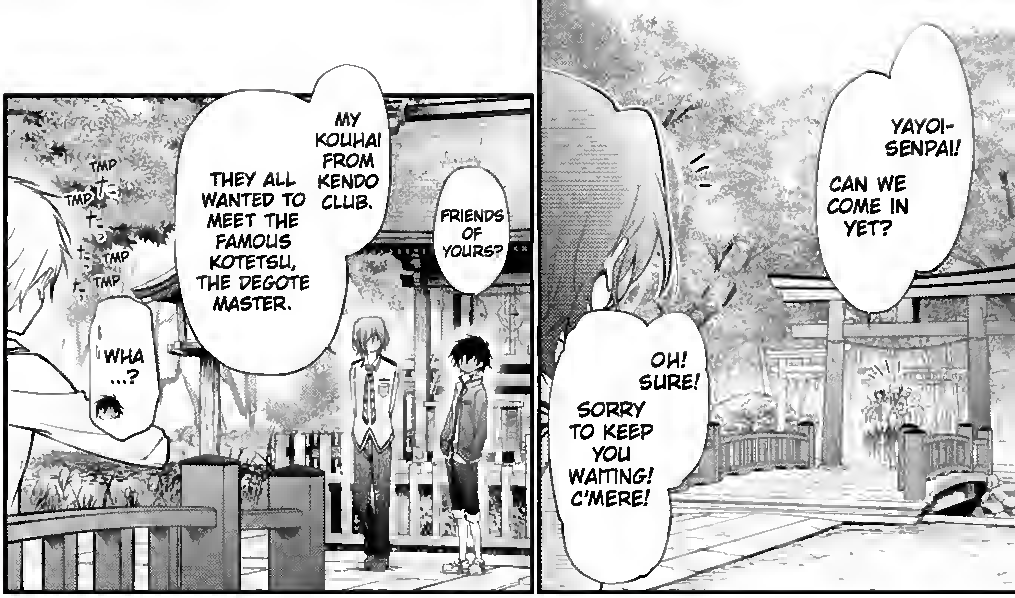
KENDO IS FOR LITTLE CHILDREN. I LEFT IT BEHIND WHEN I GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL.
GO BOTHER SOMEONE ELSE.
WHAT!?
HEH.
B-BUT...
...YOU SEEMED SO DIFFERENT IN THE MAGAZINES...!
I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF MAKING NICE TO PEOPLE TOO.
SEE YOU AROUND
HEY, WAIT!
I CAME ALL THIS WAY TO MEET YOU! EVEN JUST ONE WORD WOULD DO!
CLAP
CLAP

THIS IS MY FIRST TIME COMING HERE ALONE...
...SINCE THAT DAY, ISN'T IT...?
"DON'T GO, SAGARA!"

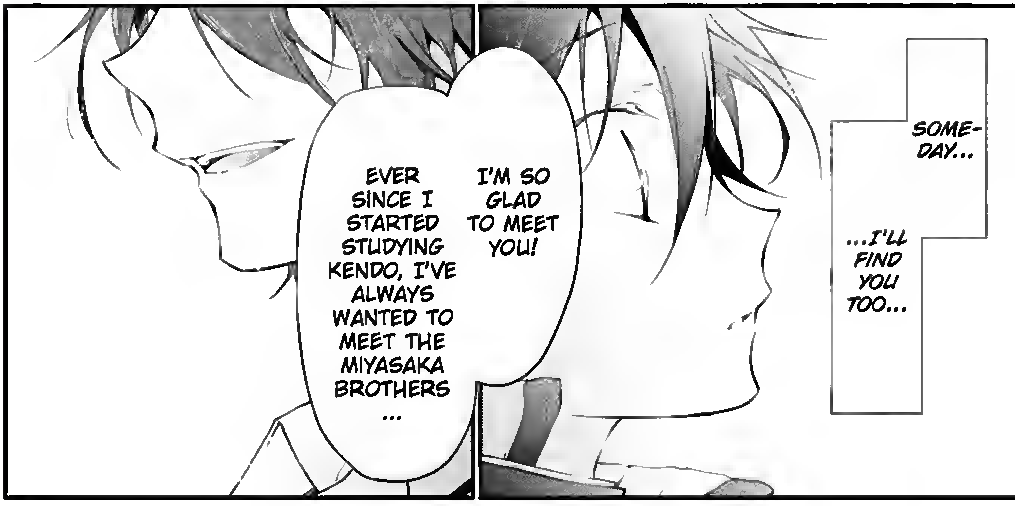
KOTETSU.
IT'S ALL RIGHT.
BY OBSERVING THE AGE WHEN I LIVED...
...YOU'VE ALREADY LEARNED SOME-THING...
...ABOUT THE MEANING OF LIFE AND DEATH.
AND SO HAVE I.
BY OBSERVING THE AGE WHEN YOU WILL LIVE...
...I'VE COME TO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF LIFE.
THAT'S WHY I'LL BE ALL RIGHT NOW.
KOTETSU.
LET'S MEET AGAIN SOMEDAY IN ANOTHER LIFE.
THIS TIME, WE'LL LIVE IN THE SAME AGE...
...AND WE'LL BE TOGETHER UNTIL THE DAY WE DIE.
I PROMISE.

"BECAUSE I KNOW I'LL FIND YOU AGAIN."
SAGARA UNDER-STOOD LIFE AND CHOSE DEATH.
I UNDER-STAND DEATH NOW, BUT I'M GOING TO LIVE...
THE GOD OF HIKAWA...
...MUST HAVE LINKED THE PAST AND THE FUTURE TO HELP US LEARN ABOUT BOTH.
THAT'S WHAT I THINK.
AND THESE SWORDS...
...HELPED BIND SAGARA AND ME TOGETHER.

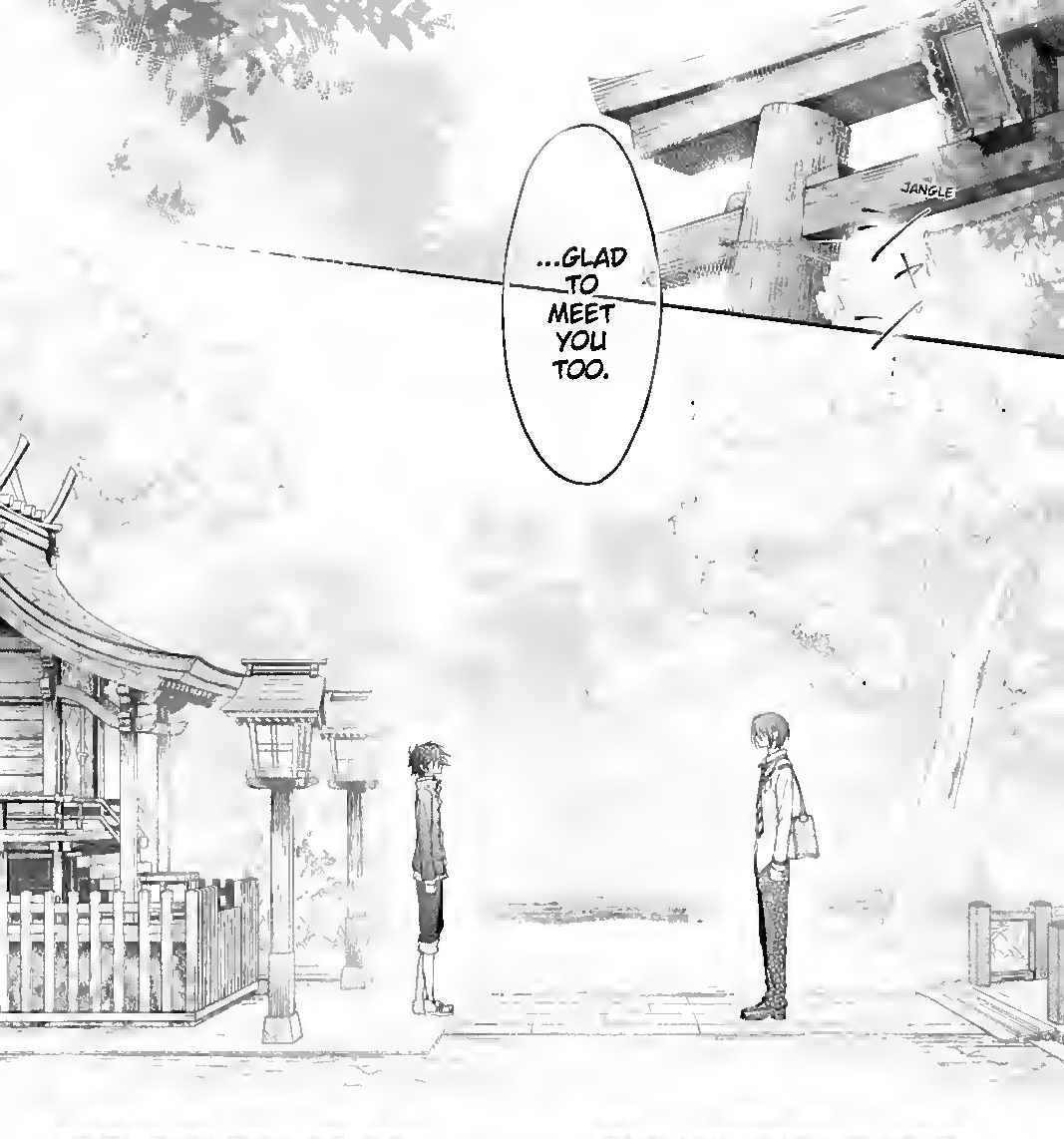
KOTE-TSU!
WHY'D YOU GO RUNNING AHEAD WITHOUT ME?
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO INVITED ME TO COME PRAY HERE AFTER THE MATCH...
SORRY, MY BAD!
I WON'T LOSE NEXT TIME, YOU KNOW!
WHAT "NEXT TIME"? AREN'T YOU RETIR-ING?
I'M GOING TO NATION-ALS!
WHAT? REALLY !?
I'LL SHOW YOU!
PLEASE LET MY STUPID BROTHER WIN NEXT TIME...

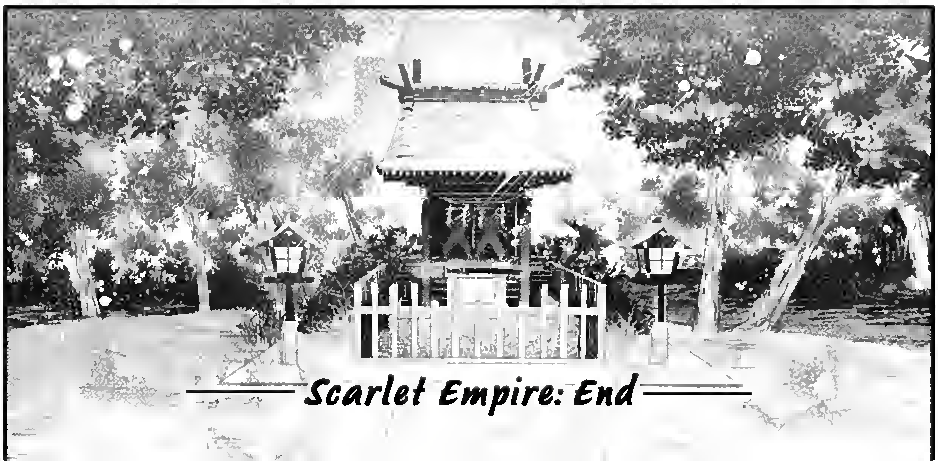

YAYOI-SENPAI! CAN WE COME IN YET?
OH! SURE! SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING! C'MERE!
FRIENDS OF YOURS?
MY KOUHAI FROM KENDO CLUB.
THEY ALL WANTED TO MEET THE FAMOUS KOTETSU, THE DEGOTE MASTER.
TMP
WHA ...?

WOW, IT'S REALLY HIM!
WHOA!
M-MAY I SHAKE YOUR HAND!?
HE'S SO TINY!
CHATTER
CHATTER
CAN I CLOBBER THE ONE WHO CALLED ME SHORT?
HEY, SAGARA... I SWEAR ...


I'M SO GLAD TO MEET YOU!
EVER SINCE I STARTED STUDYING KENDO, I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO MEET THE MIYASAKA BROTHERS ...
SOME-DAY...
...I'LL FIND YOU TOO...

WHOOSH!
ER...
IS SOME-THING WRONG ...?
NOPE.
I'M...


...GLAD TO MEET YOU TOO.
JANGLE


Scarlet Empire: End

AFTER-WORD

This is my last afterword, so this is where I'm supposed to write something serious, right? *Scarlet Empire* helped me meet new people, reacquainted me with old friends, and involved some rough farewells too. In a word, it was a bittersweet experience. Some people might call it an ordeal, but what made me determined to surmount this wall was the fact that my ordeal wasn't inflicted on me by some outside force. I set myself up for this. Everything happening around me is the result of my own attitude, words, and actions so far. If I can accept that and face it with all my strength, I can get through this and keep on living. Isn't that what it's all about? Sagara was also able to face himself by moving forward, one step and one day at a time. The value of a person can be measured by how they behave when they hold power. Doing your duty rather than clinging to your privilege is the mark of true greatness. History has forgotten the truth and smeared Sagara's name for being part of a false army, but I want to avoid bias and prejudice, see with eyes that discern the truth, and discuss the issue fully while remaining aware that there are no "right answers." I wrote this story with that desire in mind. I hope all of you will be like Kotetsu and get out there to achieve great things someday as the harbingers of a new era. When that time comes, be sure and tell me about it! And I hope to meet you out there somewhere, someday. Thank you so, so much!

Hanjirou Tsukioka

This is Tanaka, the artist. Thanks so much for picking up another book of ours! I hope you enjoyed *Scarlet Empire*.

When I first got involved with this series, everything I knew about Sagara could be summed up with, "He was the leader of the Sekihoutai." As I started to draw, I was surprised by what I learned about the kind of person Souzou Sagara really was, and about the Satsuma roshi band and the Sekihoutai, and the scarcity of remaining historical resources about them. That's why I had some concerns as I drew, because although one of the merits of the art form known as manga is how freely you can create within it, on the other hand, there's such a thing as being too free with history. At times like these, Kotetsu became the "eyes" through which I could view Sagara and history itself, and I felt like I learned a lot alongside him and grew a lot as a person. I wonder how Kotetsu and Sagara seemed in your eyes?

To our many wonderful readers, thank you for experiencing so many feelings along with us in this story!! Let's do it again sometime.

Hikaru Tanaka

special thanks.

5th Gen. Descendent of Souzou Sagara: Masahiro Kimura
Head of the Sagara Foundation: Mitsuo Abe
For their cooperation, we thank: The Suwa Board of Education, Tomosuke Kimoto, Aoki-sensei, Kakurindo Bookstore
Accounters: Hiroki Iwase, Naba-sama
For their unfailing support: Ikari-san, Keiko Nakamura, Kazuaki Koyama, Itsumi'iru-S46, Outo-Reverse-sama, Sin-Kaya-sama, Hiroitsu-sensei, and Tsubaki-ichidou-sama. Thank you all so much!!

– STAFF –

Kaneda-sama, Akitsuki Naho-sama, Shirase-sama, Igaiyagoshishi-sama

Our manager, S-sama

and you!

We love getting mail with your thoughts and reactions!

Address letters to:
Hanjirou Tsukioka or Hikaru Tanaka
c/o Yen Press
1290 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10104

SCARLET EMPIRE 4

Hanjiro Tsukioka
Hikaru Tanaka

Translation: Arijan Clark

Lettering: Xian Michele Lee, Abigail Blackman

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

SCARLET EMPIRE Volume 4 ©2015 Hanjiro Tsukioka, Hikaru Tanaka/SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. First published in Japan in 2015 by SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. English translation rights arranged with SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. and Hachette Book Group through Tuttle-Mori Agency, Inc., Tokyo.

Translation ©2016 by SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD.

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), prior written permission must be obtained by contacting the publisher at permissions@hbgusa.com. Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Yen Press
Hachette Book Group
1290 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10104

www.hachettebookgroup.com
www.yenpress.com

Yen Press is an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc.
The Yen Press name and logo are trademarks of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

First Yen Press ebook Edition: March 2016

ebook ISBN: 978-0-316-39606-6

App ISBN: 978-0-316-39607-3